

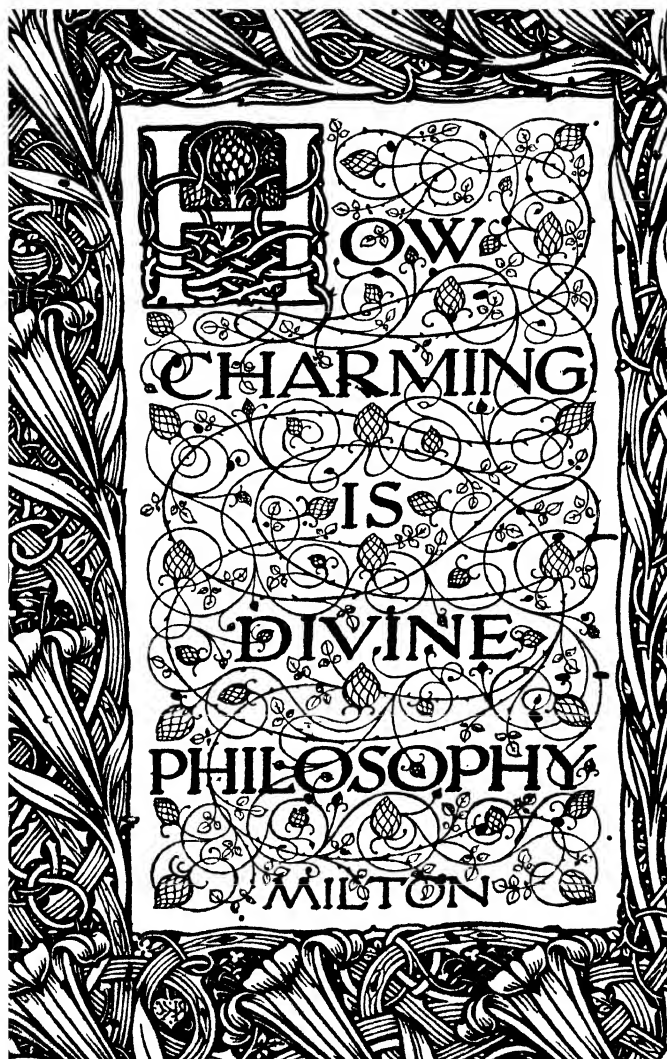
तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय

SANTINIKETAN
VISWA BHARATI
LIBRARY

E. L. 2139

275

R 52-b



SERMONS
ON BIBLE
SUBJECTS
by
FREDERICK W
ROBERTSON



LONDON: PUBLISHED
by J. M. DENT & CO
AND IN NEW YORK
BY E. P. DUTTON & CO

RICHARD CLAY & SONS, LIMITED,
BREAD STREET HILL, E.C., AND
BUNGAY, SUFFOLK.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
JACOB'S WRESTLING (JUNE 10, 1849)	9
ISAAC BLESSING HIS SONS (NOVEMBER 24, 1850)	23
JOSEPH'S FORGIVENESS OF HIS BRETHREN (JUNE 1, 1851)	31
THE ISRAELITE'S GRAVE IN A FOREIGN LAND, PREACHED ON THE FIRST DAY OF PUBLIC MOURNING FOR THE QUEEN DOWAGER (DECEMBER, 1849)	39
THE ORPHANAGE OF MOSES (FEBRUARY 16, 1851)	54
PERVERSION AS SHOWN IN THE CHARACTER OF BALAAM (JANUARY 25, 1852)	63
SELFISHNESS, AS SHOWN IN BALAAM'S CHARACTER (FEBRUARY 1, 1852)	69
THE CHARACTER OF ELI (JANUARY, 1848)	77
APPOINTMENT OF THE FIRST KING IN ISRAEL (MARCH, 1848)	87
NOTES ON PSALM LI. (JANUARY 12, 1851)	95
SOLOMON'S RESTORATION (JUNE 24, 1849)	103
ELIJAH (OCTOBER 13, 1850)	116
THE PHARISEES AND SADDUCEES AT JOHN'S BAPTISM (NOVEMBER 11, 1849)	124
THE STAR IN THE EAST (JANUARY 6, 1850)	132
JOHN'S REBUKE OF HEROD (MAY 15, 1853)	148
THE EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF JESUS (JAN. 2, 1853)	164

	PAGE
THE SYMPATHY OF CHRIST (NOVEMBER 4, 1849) . .	176
THE LONELINESS OF CHRIST (DECEMBER 31, 1849) .	190
THE GOOD SHEPHERD (MARCH 20, 1853)	201
THE FIRST MIRACLE. I. THE GLORY OF THE VIRGIN MOTHER (JANUARY 23, 1853)	216
THE FIRST MIRACLE II. THE GLORY OF THE DIVINE SON (JANUARY 30, 1853)	228
TRIUMPH OVER HINDRANCES. ZACCHEUS (OCT. 21, 1849)	241
THE HEALING OF JAIRUS' DAUGHTER (FEB. 10, 1850)	253
FAITH OF THE CENTURION (APRIL 6, 1851) . . .	264
THE PRODIGAL AND HIS BROTHER (FEB. 21, 1853)	271
PARABLE OF THE SOWER (JUNE 6, 1849)	285
THE UNJUST STEWARD (JANUARY 8, 1849) . . .	301
THE SCEPTICISM OF PILATE (NOVEMBER 7, 1852)	310
THE DOUBT OF THOMAS (MARCH 27, 1853) . . .	320
THE LAST UTTERANCES OF CHRIST (GOOD FRIDAY, 1851)	333
THREE TIMES IN A NATION'S HISTORY (DEC. 1, 1850)	341

The following is a list of the works of F. W. Robertson :—

Address delivered at Opening of Working Men's Institute, Brighton, 1849; Two Lectures on the Influence of Poetry on the Working Classes, 1852; Lectures and Addresses on Literary and Social Topics, 1858; Translation of Lessing's, "Education of the Human Race," 1858; Expository Lectures on St. Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians, 1859; Analysis of "In Memoriam," 1862; Sermons preached at Trinity Chapel, Brighton, 4 series, 1855-63; 5th series, 1890; Letters (with Life), ed. S. A. Brooke, 1865; A Few Extracts from the Early Poetical Works of F. W. R., 1870 (?), privately printed; Literary Remains (including Lectures, Addresses, and other Writings), 1876.

SERMONS ON BIBLE SUBJECTS

JACOB'S WRESTLING

GENESIS xxxii., 28, 29.—“And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel : for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed. And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name ? And he blessed him there.”

THE complexion of this story is peculiarly Jewish. It contains three points which are especially interesting to every Jew in a national point of view. It explained to him why he was called Israelite. It traces the origin of his own name, Israelite, to a distant ancestor, who had signally exhibited religious strength, and been, in the language of those times, a wrestler with God, from whence he had obtained the name Israel. It casts much deep and curious interest round an otherwise insignificant village, Peniel, where his transaction had taken place, and which derived its name from it, Peniel, the face of God. And, besides, it explained the origin of a singular custom, which might seem a superstitious one, of not suffering a particular muscle to be caten, and regarding it with a kind of religious awe, as the part in which Jacob was said by tradition to have been injured, by the earnest tension of his frame during this struggle. So far all is Jewish, narrow, merely of local interest.

Besides this, much of the story is evidently mythical.

It is clear at once, that it belongs to that earlier period of literature when traditions were preserved in a poetical shape,

Jacob's Wrestling

adapted to the rude conceptions of the day ; but enshrining, an inner and a deep truth. To disengage this truth from the form in which it is encased, is the duty of the expositor.

Now, putting aside the form of this narrative, and looking into the heart and meaning of it, it will become apparent that we have no longer anything infantine, or Jewish, or of limited interest, but a wide truth, wide as human nature ; and that there is before us the record of an inward spiritual struggle, as real now in the nineteenth century as then : and as real in every earnest man as it was in the history of Jacob.

We take these points :

I. The nameless secret of Existence.

II. The revelation of that secret to the Soul.

The circumstances which preceded this event were these : more than twenty years before, Jacob had been guilty of a deliberate sin. He had deceived his father ; he had overreached his free-spirited, impetuous, open-hearted brother Esau. Never, during all those twenty years, had he seen the man whom he had injured. But now, on the point of returning to his native country, news was brought to him of his brother's approach, which made a meeting inevitable. Jacob made all his dispositions and arrangements to prepare for the worst. He sent over the brook Jabbok first the part of his family who he valued least, and who would be the first to meet Esau ; then those whom he loved most, that, in the event of danger, they might have the greatest facility in escaping ; then Jacob was left alone, in the still, dark night. It was one of those moments in existence when a crisis is before us, to which great and pregnant issues are linked—when all has been done that foresight can devise, and the hour of action being past, the instant of reaction has come. Then the soul is left passive and helpless, gazing face to face upon the anticipated and dreadful moment which is slowly moving on. It is in these hours that, having gone through in the imagination the whole circle of resources, and found them nothing, and ourselves powerless, as in the hands of a destiny, there comes a strange and nameless

Jacob's Wrestling

11

dread, a horrible feeling of insecurity, which gives the consciousness of a want, and forces us to feel out into the abyss for something that is mightier than flesh and blood to lean upon.

Then, therefore, it was that there came the moment of a conflict within the soul of Jacob, so terrible and so violent that it seemed an actual struggle with a living man. In the darkness he had heard a Voice, and came into contact with a Form, and felt a Presence, the reality of which there was no mistaking. Now, to the unscientific mind, that which is real seems to be necessarily material too. What wonder if, to the unscientific mind of Jacob, this conflict, so real, and attended in his person with such tangible results, seemed all human and material—a conflict with a tangible antagonist? What wonder if tradition preserved it in such a form? Suppose we admit that the Being whose awful presence Jacob felt, had no form which could be grappled by a human hand, is it less real for that? Are there no realities but those which the hand can touch and the eye see?

Jacob in that hour felt the dark secret and mystery of existence.

Upon this I shall make three remarks.

I. The first has reference to the contrast observable between this and a former revelation made to Jacob's soul. This was not the first time it had found itself face to face with God. Twenty years before, he had seen in vision a ladder reared against the sky, and angels ascending and descending on it. Exceedingly remarkable. Immediately after his transgression, when leaving his father's home a banished man, to be a wanderer for many years, this first meeting took place. Fresh from his sin, God met him in tenderness and forgiveness. He saw the token which told him that all communication between heaven and earth was not severed. The way was clear and unimpeded still. Messages of reciprocated love might pass between the Father and His sinful child, as the angels in the dream ascended and descended on the visionary ladder. The possibility of saintliness was not forfeited. All that the

Jacob's Wrestling

Vision taught him. Then took place that touching, Covenant, in which Jacob bound himself to serve gratefully his father's God, and vowed the vow of a consecrated heart to Him. All that was now past. After twenty years God met him again; but this second intercourse was of a very different character. It was no longer God the Forgiver, God the Protector, God the covenanting Love, that met Jacob; but God the Awful, the Unnameable, whose breath blasts, at whose touch the flesh of the mortal shrinks and shrivels up. This is exactly the reverse of what might have been anticipated. You would have expected the darker vision of experience to come first. First the storm-struggle of the soul; then the Vision of Peace. It was exactly the reverse.

Yet all this, tried by experience, is a most true and living account. The awful feelings about Life and God are *not* those which characterize our earlier years. It is quite natural that in the first espousals of the soul in its freshness to God, bright and hopeful feelings should be the predominant or the only ones. Joy marks, and ought to mark, early religion. Nay, by God's merciful arrangement, even sin is not that crushing thing in early life which it sometimes becomes in later years, when we mourn not so much a calculable number of sinful acts, as a deep pervading sinfulness. Reporse does not corrode with its evil power then. Forgiveness is not only granted, but consciously and joyfully felt. It is as life matures, that the weight of life, the burden of this unintelligible world, and the mystery of the hidden God, are felt.

A vast amount of insincerity is produced by mistaking this. We expect in the religion of the child the experience which can only be true in the religion of the man. We force into their lips the language which describes the wrestling of the soul with God. It is twenty years too soon. God, in His awfulness, the thought of mystery which scathes the soul—how can they know that yet, before they have got the thews and sinews of the man's heart to master such a thought? They know nothing yet—they ought to know

nothing, yet of God but as the Father who is around their beds—they ought to see nothing yet but Heaven, and angels ascending and descending.

This morning, my young brethren, you presented yourselves at the Communion Table for the first time. Some of you, we trust, were conscious of meeting God. Only let us not confound the dates of Christian experience. If you did, it was not as Jacob met God on this occasion, but rather as He met Him on the earlier one. It were only a miserable forcing of insincerity upon you to require that this solemn, fearful sensation of his should be yours. Rather, we trust, you felt God present as the Lord of Love. A ladder was raised for you to heaven. Oh! we trust that the feeling in some cases at least was this—as of angels ascending and descending upon a Child of God.

2. Again, I remark, that the end, and aim of Jacob's struggle was to know the name of God. "Tell me, I pray thee, thy name." A very unimportant desire at first sight. For what signifies a name? In these days, when names are only epithets, it signifies nothing. "Jehovah, Jove, or Lord," as the "Universal Prayer" insinuates, are all the same. Now, to assert that it matters not whether God be called Jehovah, Jove, or Lord, is true, if it mean this, that a devout and earnest heart is accepted by God, let the name be what it will by which He is addressed. But if it mean that Jove and Jehovah express the same Being—that the character of Him whom the Pagan worshipped was the same as the character of Him whom Israel adored under the name of Jehovah—that they refer to the same group of ideas—or that always names are but names, then we must look much deeper.

In the Hebrew history are discernible three periods distinctly marked, in which names and words bore very different characters. These three it has been observed by acute philologists, correspond to the periods in which the nation bore the three different appellations of Hebrews, Israelites, Jews.

In the first of these periods, names meant truths, and

words were the symbols of realities. The characteristics of the names given then were simplicity and sincerity. They were drawn from a few simple sources: either from some characteristic of the individual, as Jacob, the supplanter, or Moses, drawn from the water; or from the idea of family, as Ben-jamin, the son of my right hand; or from the conception of the tribe or nation, then gradually consolidating itself; or, lastly, from the religious idea of God. But in this case not the highest notion of God—not Jah or Jehovah, but simply the earlier and simpler idea of Deity: El.—Israel, the prince of El; Peniel, the face of El.

In these days names were real, but the conceptions they contained were not the loftiest.

The second period begins about the time of the departure from Egypt, and it is characterized by unabated simplicity, with the addition of sublimer thought and feeling more intensely religious. The heart of the nation was big with mighty and new religious truth—and the feelings with which the national heart was swelling found vent in the names which were given abundantly. God, under His Name Jah, the noblest assemblage of spiritual truths yet conceived, became the adjunct to names of places and persons. Oshea's name is changed into Je-hoshua.

Observe moreover, that in this period there was no fastidious, over-refined chariness in the use of that name. Men, conscious of deep and real reverence, are not fearful of the appearance of irreverence. The word became a common word, as it always may, so long as it is felt, and awe is real. A mighty cedar was called a cedar of Jehovah—a lofty mountain, a mountain of Jehovah. Human beauty even was praised by such an epithet. Moses was divinely fair, beautiful to God. The Eternal name became an adjunct. No beauty—no greatness—no goodness, was conceivable, except as emanating from Him: therefore His name was freely but most devoutly used.

Like the earlier period, in this, too, words mean realities; but, unlike the earlier period, they are impregnated with deeper religious thought.

The third period was at its zenith in the time of Christ:— words had lost their meaning, and shared the hollow unreal state of all things. A man's name might be Judas, and still he might be a traitor. A man might be called Pharisee, exclusively religious, and yet the name might only cover the hollowness of hypocrisy; or he might be called most noble Festus, and be the meanest tyrant that ever sat upon a proconsular chair. This is the period in which every keen and wise observer knows that the decay of national religious feeling has begun. That decay in the meaning of words, that lowering of the standard of the ideas for which they stand, is a certain mark of this. The debasement of a language is a sure mark of the debasement of a nation. The insincerity of a language is a proof of the insincerity of a nation: for a time comes in the history of a nation when words no longer stand for things; when names are given for the sake of an euphonious sound; and when titles are but the epithets of unmeaning courtesy:—a time when Majesty—Defender of the Faith—Most Noble—Worshipful, and Honourable—not only mean nothing, but do not flush the cheek with the shame of convicted falsehood when they are worn as empty ornaments.

The Name of God shares this fate. A nation may reach the state in which the Eternal Name can be used to point a sentence, or adorn a familiar conversation, and no longer shock the ear with the sound of blasphemy, because in good truth the Name no longer stands for the Highest, but for a meaner conception, an idol of the debased mind. *E.g.* In a foreign language, the language of a light and irreligious people, the Eternal Name can be used as a light expletive and conversational ejaculation, and not shock any religious sensibility. You could not do that in English. It would sound like a blasphemy to say, in light talk, My God! or, Good God! Your flesh would creep at hearing it. But in that language the word has lost its sacredness, because it has lost its meaning. It means no more than Jove or Baal. It means a Being whose existence has become a nursery fable. No marvel that we are taught to pray, "Hallowed

be Thy Name." We cannot pray a deeper prayer for our country than to say—Never may that Name in English stand for a lower idea than it stands for now. There is a solemn power in words, because words are the expression of character. "By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned."

Yet in this period, exactly in proportion as the solemnity of the idea was gone, reverence was scrupulously paid to the corpse-like word which remained and had once enclosed it. In that hollow, artificial age, the Jew would wipe his pen before he ventured to write the Name—he would leave out the vowels of the sacred Jehovah, and substitute those of the less sacred Elohim. In that kind of age, too, men bow to the name of Jesus, often just in that proportion in which they have ceased to recognise His true grandeur and majesty of character.

In such an age, it would be indeed preposterous to spend the strength upon an inquiry such as this: "Tell me Thy Name?" Jehovah, Jove, or Lord—what matter?—But Jacob did not live in this third period, when names meant nothing: nor did he live in the second, when words contained the deepest truth the nation is ever destined to receive. But he lived in the first age, when men are sincere, and truthful, and earnest, and names exhibit character. To tell Jacob the Name of God was to reveal to him what God is, and who.

3. I observe a third thing. This desire of Jacob was not the one we should naturally have expected on such an occasion. He is alone—his past fault is coming retributively on a guilty conscience—he dreads the meeting with his brother. His soul is agonized with *that*, and *that* we naturally expect will be the subject and the burden of his prayer. No such thing! Not a word about Esau—not a word about personal danger at all. All that is banished completely for the time, and deeper thoughts are grappling with his soul. To get safe through to-morrow? No, no, no! To be blessed by God—to know Him, and what He is—that is the battle of Jacob's soul from sunset till the dawn of day.

And this is our struggle—the struggle. Let any true man go down into the deeps of his own being, and answer us,—what is the cry that comes from the most real part of his nature? Is it the cry for daily bread? Jacob asked for that in his *first* communing with God—preservation, safety. Is it even this,—to be forgiven our sins? Jacob had a sin to be forgiven, and in that most solemn moment of his existence he did not say a syllable about it. Or is it this—“Hallowed be Thy Name”? No, my brethren. Out of our frail and yet sublime humanity, the demand that rises in the earthlier hours of our religion may be this—save my soul; but in the most unearthly moments it is this—“Tell me thy name.” We move through a world of mystery; and the deepest question is, What is the Being that is ever near, sometimes felt, never seen,—That which has haunted us from childhood with a dream of something surpassingly fair, which has never yet been realized—That which sweeps through the soul at times as a desolation, like the blast from the wings of the Angel of Death, leaving us stricken and silent in our loneliness—That which has touched us in our tenderest point, and the flesh has quivered with agony, and our mortal affections have shrivelled up with pain—That which comes to us in aspirations and nobleness, and conceptions of superhuman excellence. Shall we say It or He? What is It? Who is He? Those anticipations of Immortality and God—what are they? Are they the mere throbbings of my own heart, heard and mistaken for a living something beside me? Are they the sound of my own wishes, echoing through the vast void of Nothingness? or shall I call them God, Father, Spirit, Love? A living Being within me or outside me? Tell me Thy Name, thou awful mystery of Loveliness! This is the struggle of all earnest life.

We come now to,

II. *The revelation of the Mystery.*

1. It was revealed by awe. Very significantly are we told that the Divine antagonist seemed as it were anxious to depart as the day was about to dawn; and that Jacob held

Him more convulsively fast, as if aware that the daylight was likely to rob him of his anticipated blessing : in which there seems concealed a very deep truth. God is approached more nearly in that which is indefinite than in that which is definite and distinct. He is felt in awe, and wonder and worship, rather than in clear conceptions. There is a sense in which darkness has more of God than light has. He dwells in the thick darkness. Moments of tender, vague mystery often bring distinctly the feeling of His presence. When day breaks and distinctness comes, the Divine has evaporated from the soul like morning dew. In sorrow, haunted by uncertain presentiments, we feel the infinite around us. The gloom disperses, the world's joy comes again, and it seems as if God were gone—the Being who had touched us with a withering hand, and wrestled with us, yet whose presence, even when most terrible, was more blessed than His absence. It is true, even literally, that the darkness reveals God. Every morning God draws the curtain of the garish light across His eternity, and we lose the Infinite. We look down on earth instead of up to heaven, on a narrower and more contracted spectacle—that which is examined by the microscope when the telescope is laid aside—smallness, instead of vastness. “Man goeth forth unto his work and to his labour till the evening ;” and in the dust and pettiness of life we seem to cease to behold him : then at night He undraws the curtain again, and we see how much of God and Eternity the bright distinct day has hidden from us. Yes, in solitary, silent, vague darkness, the Awful One is near.

This morning, young Brethren, we endeavoured to act on this belief—we met in stillness, before the full broad glare of day had rested on our world. Your first Communion implored his blessing in the earlier hour which seems so peculiarly His. Before the dull, and deadening, and earthward influences of the world had dried up the dew of fresh morning feeling, you tried to fortify your souls with a sense of His presence. This night, before to-morrow's light shall dawn, pray that He will not depart until He has left upon

your hearts the blessing of a strength which shall be yours through the garish day, and through dry, scorching life, even to the close of your days.

2. Again: this revelation was made in an unsyllabled blessing. Jacob requested two things. He asked for a blessing—and he prayed to know the Name of God. God gave him the blessing. "He blessed him there," but refused to tell His Name. "Wherefore dost thou ask after my Name?"

In this, too, seems to lie a most important truth. Names have a power, a strange power, of hiding God. Speech has been bitterly defined as the art of hiding thought. Well, that sarcastic definition has in it a truth. The Eternal Word is the Revealer of God's thought; and every true word of man is originally the expression of a thought; but by degrees the word hides the thought. Language is valuable for the things of this life; but for the things of the other world, it is an encumbrance almost as much as an assistance. Words often hide from us our ignorance of even earthly truth. The child asks for information, and we satiate his curiosity with words. Who does not know how we satisfy ourselves with the name of some strange bird or plant, or the name of some new law in nature? It is a mystery perplexing us before. We get the name, and fancy we understand something more than we did before; but, in truth, we are more hopelessly ignorant: for before we felt there was a something we had not attained, and so we inquired and searched—now, we fancy we possess it, because we have got the name by which it is known: and the word covers over the abyss of our ignorance. If Jacob had got a word, that word might have satisfied him. He would have said, Now I understand God, and know all about Him.

Besides, names and words soon lose their meaning. In the process of years and centuries the meaning dies off them like the sunlight from the hills. The hills are there—the colour and life are gone. The words of that creed, for example, which we read last Sunday (Athanasian), were living words a few centuries ago. They have changed their

meaning, and are, to ninety-nine out of every hundred, only dead words. Yet men tenaciously hold to the expressions of which they do not understand the meaning, and which have a very different meaning now from what they had once—Person, Proceſſion, Substance ; and they are almost worſe with them than without them—for they conceal their ignorance, and place a barrier againſt the earneſtneſs of inquiry. We repeat the creed by rote, but the profound truths of Being which the creed contains, how many of us underſtand ?

All this affords an inſtructive leſſon to parents and to teachers. In the education of a pupil or a child, the wiſe way is to deal with him as God dealt with His pupil, the child-man Jacob : for before the teaching of God, the wiſeſt man, what is he but a child ? God's plan was not to give names and words, but truths of feeling. That night, in that ſtrange ſcene, He impreſſed on Jacob's ſoul a religious awe which was hereafter to develop,—not a ſet of formal expreſſions, which would have ſatisfied with huſks the cravings of the intellect and ſhut up the ſoul :—Jacob felt the Infinite, who is more truly felt when leaſt named. Words would have reduced that to the Finite : for, oh ! to know all about God is one thing—to know the living God is another. Our rule ſeems to be this : Let a child's religion be expaſive—capable of expaſion—as little ſyſtematic as poſſible : let it lie upon the heart like the light looſe ſoil, which can be broken through as the heart burſts into fuller life. If it be trodden down hard and ſtiff in formularies, it is more than probable that the whole muſt be burſt through, and broken violently and thrown off altogeth'er, when the ſoul requires room to germinate.

And in this way, my young brethren, I have tried to deal with you. Not in creeds, nor even in the ſtiffneſs of the catechiſm, has truth been put before you. Rather has it been truſted to the impuſes of the heart ; on which, we believe, God works more efficaciously than we can do. A few ſimple truths : and then theſe have been left to work, and germinate, and ſwell. Baptiſm reveals to you this truth

for the heart, that God is your Father, and that Christ has encouraged you to live as your Father's children. It has revealed that Name which Jacob knew not—Love. Confirmation has told you another truth, that of self-dedication to Him. Heaven is the service of God. The highest blessedness of life is powers and self consecrated to His will. These are the germs of truth : but it would have been miserable self-delusion, and most pernicious teaching, to have aimed at exhausting truth, or systematizing it. We are jealous of over-systematic teaching. God's love to you—the sacrifice of your lives to God—but the meaning of that? Oh! a long, long life will not exhaust the meaning—the Name of God. Feel Him more and more—all else is but empty words.

Lastly, the effect of this Revelation was to change Jacob's character. His name was changed from Jacob to Israel, because himself was an altered man. Hitherto there had been something subtle in his character—a certain cunning and craft—~~a~~ want of breadth, as if he had no firm footing upon reality. The forgiveness of God twenty years before had not altered this. He remained Jacob, the subtle supplanter still. For, indeed, a man whose religion is chiefly the sense of forgiveness, does not thereby rise into integrity or firmness of character—a certain tenderness of character may very easily go along with a great deal of subtlety. Jacob was tender and devout, and grateful for God's pardon, and only half honest still. But this half-insincere man is brought into contact with the awful God, and his subtlety falls from him. He becomes real at once. Every insincere habit of mind shrivels in the face of God. One clear true glance into the depths of Being, and the whole man is altered. The name changes because the character has changed. No longer Jacob the supplanter, but Israel the Prince of God—the champion of the Lord, who had fought with God and conquered ; and who, henceforth, will fight for God and be His true loyal soldier : a larger, more unselfish name—a larger and more unselfish man—honest and true at last. No man becomes honest till he has got face to

Jacob's Wreſtling

face with God. There is a certain insincerity about us all—a something dramatic. One of those dreadful moments which throw us upon ourselves, and strip off the hollowness of our outside show, must come before the insincere is true. . .

And again, young brethren, such a moment, at least of truthfulness, ought to have been this morning. Let the old pass. Let the name of the world pass into the Christian name. Baptism and Confirmation, the one gives, and the other reminds us of the giving of a better name and a truer. Henceforth be men. Lose the natural frailty, whatever it is. See God, and you *will* lose it.

To conclude, here is a question for each man separately—What is the name of your God? Not in the sense of this age, but in the sense of Jacob's age. What is the *Name* of the Deity you worship? In the present modern sense of Name, by which nothing more than epithet is meant, of course the reply is easy. The name of yours is the God of Christian worship—the threefold One—the Author of Existence, manifested in Divine humanity, commingling with us as pure spirit—The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. That, of course, you say is the name of your God. Now, put away names—give words to the winds. What do you adore in your heart of hearts? What is the name oftenest on your lips in your unfettered, spontaneous moments? If we overheard your secret thoughts, who and what is it which is to you the greatest and the best that you would desire to realize? The character of the rich man, or the successful, or the admired? Would the worst misery which could happen to you be the wreck of property—the worst shame, not to have done wrong, but to have sunk in the estimation of society? Then in the classifications of earth, which separate men into Jews, Christians, Mahometans, &c., you may rank as a worshipper of the Christian's God. But in the nomenclature of heaven, where names cannot stand for things, God sees you as an idolater—your highest is not His highest. The Name that is above every name is not the description of your God.

For life and death we have made our choice. The life

of Christ—the life of truth and love ; and if it must be, as the result of that, the cross of Christ, with the obloquy and shame that wait on truth—that is the name before which we bow. In this world “there are Gods many, and Lords many : but to us there is but one Lord, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

ISAAC BLESSING HIS SONS

GENESIS xxvii. 1-4.—“And it came to pass, that when Isaac was old, and his eyes were dim, so that he could not see, he called Esau his eldest son, and said unto him, My son : and he said unto him, Behold, *here am I*.—And he said, Behold now, I am old, I know not the day of my death :—Now therefore take, I pray thee, thy weapons, thy quiver and thy bow, and go out to the field, and take me *some* venison ;—And make me savoury meat, such as I love, and bring *it* to me, that I may eat ; that my soul may bless thee before I die.”

In chapter xxv. we find Abraham preparing for death by a last will : making Isaac his heir, and providing for his other children by giving them gifts while he yet lived, and so sending them out into the world. In this chapter, the heir himself is preparing to die. The rapidity with which these chapters epitomize life, bringing its few salient points together, is valuable as illustrative of what human existence is. It is a series of circles intersecting each other, but going on in a line. A few facts comprise man's life. A birth—a marriage—another birth—a baptism—a will—and then a funeral : and the old circle begins again.

Isaac is about to declare his last will. It is a solemn act in whatever light we view it, if it were only for the thought that we are writing words which will not be read till we are gone. But it is solemn too, because it is one of those acts which tell of the immortal. First in the way of prophetic prescience. Is it not affecting to think of a human being, not sick, nor in pain, with his natural force unabated, calmly

sitting down to make arrangements for what shall be when he is in his last long sleep? But the act of an immortal is visible also in that a dead man rules the world, as it were, long after his decease. Being dead, in a sense he yet speaketh. He is yet present with the living. His existence is protracted beyond its natural span. His will is law. This is a kind of evidence of his immortality: for the obedience of men to what he has willed is a sort of recognition of his present being.

Isaac was not left without warnings of his coming end. These warnings came in the shape of dimness of eyes and failing of sight. You can conceive a state in which man should have no warnings: and instead of gradual decay, should drop suddenly, without any intimation, into eternity. Such an arrangement might have been. But God has in mercy provided reminders. For we sleep in this life of ours a charmed sleep, which it is hard to break. And if the road were of unbroken smoothness, with no jolt or shock, or unevenness in the journey, we should move swiftly on, nothing breaking that dead slumber till we awake suddenly, like the rich man in the parable, lifting up our eyes in heaven or in hell. Therefore God has given these reminders. Some of them regular—such as failing of sight, falling out of hair, decay of strength, loss of memory—which are as stations in the journey, telling us how far we have travelled; others irregular—such as come in the form of sickness, bereavement, pain—like sudden shocks which jolt, arouse, and awaken. Then the man considers, and like Isaac, says, "Behold I am old, I know not the day of my death." We will consider—

I. Isaac's preparation for death.

II. The united treachery of Jacob and Rebekah.

I. Isaac's preparation for death.—First, he longed for the performance of Esau's filial kindness as for a last time. Esau was his favourite son: not on account of any similarity between them, but just because they were dissimilar. The

repose, and contemplativeness, and inactivity of Isaac found a contrast in which it rested, in the energy and even the recklessness of his firstborn. It was natural to yearn for the feast of his son's affection for the last time. For there is something peculiarly impressive in whatever is done for the last time. Then the simplest acts contract a kind of sacredness. The last walk in the country we are leaving. The last time a dying man sees the sun set. The last words of those from whom we have parted, which we treasure up as more than accidental, almost prophetic. The winding up of a watch, as the last act at night. The signature of a will. In the life of Him in whom we find every feeling which belongs to unperverted Humanity, the same desire is found : a trait therefore, of the heart which is universal, natural, and right. "With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer. For I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom." It was the *Last Supper*.

2. By making his last testamentary dispositions. Apparently they were premature, but he did not defer them : partly because of the frailty of life, and the uncertainty whether there may be any to-morrow for that which is put off to-day : partly perhaps, because he desired to have all earthly thoughts done with and put away. Isaac lived thirty or forty years after this : but he was a man set apart : like one who, in Roman Catholic language, had received extreme unction, and had done with this world ; and when he came to die, there would be no anxieties about the disposition of property to harass him. It is good to have all such things done with before that hour comes : there is something incongruous in the presence of a lawyer in the death-room, agitating the last hours. The first portion of our lives is spent in learning the use of our senses and faculties : ascertaining where we are and what. The second in using those powers, and acting in the given sphere : the motto being, "Work, the night cometh." A third portion between active life and the grave, like the twilight between day and night,

not light enough for working, nor yet quite dark, which nature seems to accord for unworldliness and meditation. It is striking doubtless, to see an old man, hale and vigorous to the last, dying at his work like a warrior in armour. But natural feeling makes us wish perhaps, that an interval might be given: a season for the statesman, such as that which Samuel had, on laying aside the cares of office, in the schools of the prophets; such as Simeon had, and Anna, for a life of devotion in the temple; such as the labourer has when, his long days' work done, he finds an asylum in the almshouse; such as our Church desires, where she prays against sudden death: a season of interval in which to watch, and meditate, and wait.

II.—The united treachery of Jacob and Rebekah.—It was treachery in both: in one sense it was the same treachery. Each deceived Isaac and overreached Esau. But it would be a rough estimate to treat the two sins as identical. This is the coarse, common way of judging. We label sins as by a catalogue. We judge of men by their acts; but it is far truer to say that we can only judge the acts by the man. You must understand the man before you can appreciate his deed. The same deed done by two different persons ceases to be the same. Abraham and Sarah both laughed when informed that they should have a son in their old age. But Sarah's (Gen. xviii. 12–15) was the laugh of scepticism: the other (Gen. xvii. 17) the result of that reaction in our nature by which the most solemn thoughts are balanced by a sense of strangeness or even ludicrousness. The Pharisees asked a sign, in unbelief: many of the Old Testament saints did the same in faith. Fine discrimination is therefore necessary to understand the simplest deed. A very delicate analysis of character is necessary to comprehend such acts as these, and rightly to apportion their turpitude and their palliations.

In Rebekah's case the root of the treachery was ambition; but here we find a trait of female character. It is a woman's ambition, not a man's. Rebekah desired nothing

for herself, but everything for Jacob: for him spiritual blessing—at all events, temporal distinction. She did wrong, not for her own advantage, but for the sake of one she loved. Here is a touch of womanhood. The same is observable in the recklessness of personal consequences. So as only *he* might gain, she did not care. “Upon me, be the curse, my son.” And it is this which forces us, even while we must condemn, to compassionate. Throughout the whole of this revolting scene of deceit and fraud, we can never forget that Rebekah was a mother. And hence a certain interest and sympathy are sustained. Another feminine trait is seen in the conduct of Rebekah. It was devotion to a person rather than to a principle. A man’s idolatry is for an idea, a woman’s is for a person. A man suffers for a monarchy, a woman for a king. A man’s martyrdom differs from a woman’s. Nay, even in their religion, personality marks the one, attachment to an idea or principle the other. Woman adores God in His personality; man adores Him in his attributes. At least that is on the whole the characteristic difference. Now here you see the idolatry of the woman: sacrificing her husband, her elder son, high principle; her own soul, for an idolized person. Remark that this was properly speaking idolatry. For in nothing is a greater mistake made than in the conception attached to that word in reference to the affections. A mother’s affection is called, by many religious people, idolatry, because it is intense. Do not mistake. No one ever loved child, brother, sister, too much. It is not the intensity of affection, but its interference with truth and duty, that makes it idolatry. Rebekah loved her son more than truth, *i. e.* more than God. This was to idolize. And hence Christ says, “If any man love father or mother more than me, he is not worthy of me.” You can only test that when a principle comes in the way. There are persons who would romantically admire this devotion of Rebekah, and call it beautiful. To sacrifice all, even principle, for another,—what higher proof of affection can there be? O miserable sophistry! The only true

affection is that which is subordinate to a higher. It has been truly said, that in those who love little, love is a primary affection: a secondary one in those who love much. Be sure he cannot love another much who loves not honour more. For that higher affection sustains and elevates the lower human one, casting round it a glory which mere personal feeling could never give. Compare, for instance, Rebekah's love for Jacob with that of Abraham for his son Isaac. Abraham was ready to sacrifice his son to duty. Rebekah sacrificed truth and duty to her son. Which loved a son most?—which was the nobler love? Even as a question of permanence, which would last the longer? For consider what respect this guilty son and guilty mother could retain for each other after this: would not love change into shame and lose itself in recriminations? For affection will not long survive respect, however it may protract its life by effort.

Observe again, monsters do not exist. When you hear of great criminality, you think of natures originally monstrous, not like others. But none are liars for the sake of lying. None are cruel for cruelty's sake. It is simply want of principle that makes glaring sins. The best affections perverted—that is the history of great crimes. See here: there is no touch of compunction from first to last. The woman seems all unsexed. She has no thought of her defrauded eldest son; none of her deceived husband. There is an inflexible pursuit of her object, that is all. It is wonderful how ambition and passion dazzle to all but the end desired. It is wonderful how the true can become false, and the tender-hearted hard and cruel for an end. Nor is this lesson obsolete. Are there no women who would do the same now? Are there none who would sacrifice a son's principles or a daughter's happiness to a diseased appetite for distinction? Are there none who would conceal a son's extravagance, foster it, furnish it means unknown, or in an underhand way, in what is called the manœuvring of fashionable life; and do that for family advancement from which the strong sense and principle of

a father would recoil and revolt? And all this, not because they are monsters, but because their passion for distinction is inflamed, and their affections unregulated.

• Now look at Jacob's sin. He was not without ambition; but he had not that unscrupulous, inflexible will which generally accompanies ambition and makes it irresistible. A bad man naturally he was not: nor a false man: but simply a pliable and weak man. Hence he became the tool of another—the agent in a plan of villany which he had not the contrivance to originate. He was one of those who, if they could, would have what they wish innocently. He would not play false, yet he would unjustly have. He was rather afraid of doing the deceit, than anxious that the deceit should not be done. Here was the guilt in its germ. He had indulged and pampered the fancy; and be sure he who wishes a temporal end for itself, does, or will soon, will the means. All temptations and all occasions of sin are powerless, except as far as they fall in with previous meditations upon the guilt. An act of sin is only a train long laid, fired by a spark at last. Jacob pondered over the desire of the blessing, dallied with it, and then fell. Now observe the rapidity and the extent of the inward deterioration. See how this plain, simple man, Jacob, becomes by degrees an accomplished deceiver; how he shrinks at nothing; how, at first unable to conceive the plan devised by another, he becomes at last inventive. At first the acted falsehood—a semblance; then the lie in so many words; then the impious use of the name, “The Lord thy God brought it me.” How he was forced by fear and the necessities of begun guilt into enormity: deeper and deeper. Happy the man who cannot, even from the faint shadows of his own experience, comprehend the desperate agony of such a state: the horror mixed with hardening effrontery with which a man feels himself compelled to take step after step, and is aware at last that he is drifting, drifting, from the great shore of truth—like one carried out by the tide against his will, till he finds himself at last in a sea of falsehood, his whole life one great dream of false appearance.

30' Isaac Blessing His Sons

Let us apply this briefly.

Doubtless perverted good is always different from original vice. In his darkest wanderings, one in whom the Spirit strives is essentially different from one who is utterly depraved. Sensibility to anguish makes the difference, if there be nothing else. Jacob lying in this way, plunging head-long, deeper and deeper, was yet a different man from one who is through and through hollow. Grant this—and yet that fact of human pervertibility is an awful fact and mystery. Innocence may become depraved ; delicate purity may pass into grossness. It is an appalling fact. Transparency of crystal clearness may end in craft, double-dealing, contrivance. Briefly, therefore,—

1. Learn to say “No.”

2. Beware of those fancies, those day-dreams, which represent things as possible which should be for ever impossible. Beware of that affection which cares for your happiness more than for your honour.

Lastly, in the hour of strong temptations, throwing ourselves off self, distrusting ourselves ; let us rest in Him who, having been tempted, knows what temptation is, who “will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it.”

JOSEPH'S FORGIVENESS OF HIS BRETHREN

GENESIS I. 15-21.—“And when Joseph's brethren saw that their father was dead, they said, Joseph will peradventure hate us, and will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him.—And they sent a messenger unto Joseph, saying, Thy father did command before he died, saying,—So shall ye say unto Joseph, Forgive, I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin; for they did unto thee evil: and now, we pray thee, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father. And Joseph wept when they spake unto him.—And his brethren also went and fell down before his face; and they said, Behold, we be thy servants.—And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for *am* I in the place of God?—But as for you, ye thought evil against me; *but* God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as *it is* this day, to save much people alive.—Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them.”

CHRISTIANITY is a revelation of the Love of God: a demand of our love by God based thereon. Christianity is a revelation of Divine forgiveness—a requirement thereupon that we should forgive each other.

“A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another” (John xiii. 34). “Ye call Me Master and Lord: and ye say well, for so I am. If I, then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you” (John xiii. 13-15). “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” (Matt. vi. 12). “Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another” (1 John iv. 11). “Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you” (Ephes. iv. 32).

Now these duties of love, forgiveness, service, are called “new commandments.” But we should greatly mistake if we suppose that they are new in this sense, that they were created by the Gospel, and did not exist before. The Gospel did not *make* God love us: it only revealed His love. The

Gospel did not make it our duty to forgive and love: it only revealed the eternal order of things, to transgress which is our misery. These belong to the eternal order and idea of our Humanity. We are not planted by Christ in a new arbitrary state of human relationships, but redeemed into the state to which we were created.

So St. John says, "I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning. Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him and in you; because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth" (1 John ii. 7, 8)—old, because of the eternal order of Love; new, because shown in the light of the Love of Christ. Christianity is the True Life—the Right Humanity.

Now the proof of this is, that ages before Christ appeared, they who gave themselves up to God to be led, instead of to their own hearts, did actually reduce to practice, and manifested in their lives, those very principles which, as principles, were only revealed by Christ.

Here for instance, three thousand years before Christ, Joseph, a Hebrew slave, taught by life's vicissitudes, educated by God, acts out practical Christianity: one of its deepest and most difficult lessons. There is nothing in the New Testament more childlike than this forgiveness of his brethren. Some perhaps may be shocked at dwelling on this thought: it seems to them to derogate from Christ. This is as if they thought that they honoured Christ by believing that until He came no truth was known—that He created truth. These persons tremble at every instance of a noble or pure life which can be shown in persons not enlightened by Christianity. But in truth, this is a corroboration of Christianity. Christianity is a full revelation of the truth of Life, into which every one who had been here had, in his measure, struck his roots before. It is simply the Truth, "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." And all instances of such a life only corroborate the truth of the Revelation.

We divide our subject into two parts :—

- I. The petition of the brethren.
- II. Joseph's forgiveness.

I. The petition was suggested by their own anticipations of vengeance (v. 15). Now whence came these anticipations? I reply, from their own hearts. Under similar circumstances they would have acted so, and they took for granted that Joseph would. We suspect according to our nature; we look on others as we feel. Suspicion proves character: so does Faith. We believe and suspect as we are. But unless there had been safety for them in Joseph's heart, a guarantee in the nobleness of Joseph's nature, their abject humiliation would have saved them nothing. Little they knew the power of hate, the sweetness of revenge, if they fancied that a grudge treasured up so many years would be foregone on the very verge of accomplishment for the sake of any satisfaction, prayer, apology. Now the error of Joseph's brethren is our error towards God. Like them, we impute to God our own vindictive feelings: and, like them, we pray a prayer which is in itself an insult or absurd. We think that sin is an injury, a personal affront, instead of a contradiction of our own nature, a departure from the Divine harmony, a disfigurement of what is good. Consequently we expect that God resents it. Our vindictive feelings we impute to God: we would revenge, therefore we think He would. And then in this spirit, "Forgive us," means, "Forego Thy vengeance. Do not retaliate. I have injured Thee; but lo! I apologize, I lie in the dust. Bear no malice, indulge no rancour, O God!" This is the heathen prayer which we often offer up to God. And just as it must have been unavailing in Joseph's case except there were safety in Joseph's character, so must it be useless in ours unless in God's nature there be a guarantee which we think our prayers create. Think you that God, if revengeful, can be bought off by prayer, by rolling in the dust, by unmanly cries, by coaxing, or flattery? God's

forgiveness is the regeneration of our nature. God cannot avert the consequences of our sin.

We must get rid of these heathen ideas of God: God's forgiveness is properly our regeneration. You cannot by prayer buy off God's vindictiveness: for God is not vindictiveness, but Love. You cannot by prayer avert the consequences of sin: for the consequences are boundless, inseparable from the act. Nor is there in time or eternity anything that can sever the connection. If you think that you can sin, and then by cries avert the consequences of sin, you insult God's character. You can only redeem the past by alteration of the present. By faith in God's love, by communion with His Spirit, you may redeem yourself; but you cannot win the love of God by entreaty, unless that love be yours already: yours, that is, when you claim it.

2. Next, observe the petition was caused by their father's insisting on their asking pardon.

He recognised the duty of apology. For Jacob knew that Joseph bore no malice. Not to change Joseph, but to fulfil their obligations, he gave the charge that required satisfaction. We know how false conceptions are of satisfaction: in the language of the old duel, to give satisfaction meant to give one who had been injured by you an opportunity of taking your life. In the language of semi-heathen Christianity, to satisfy God, means to give God an equivalent in blood for an insult offered. No wonder that with such conceptions the duty of apology is hard—almost impossible. We cannot say, "I have erred," because it gives a triumph. Now the true view of Satisfaction is this—to satisfy, not revenge, but the Law of Right. The sacrifice of Christ satisfied God, because it exhibited that which alone can satisfy Him, the entire surrender of Humanity. The satisfaction of an apology is doing the right—satisfying—doing all that can be done.

It may be our lot to be in Jacob's circumstances: we may be arbiters in a dispute, or seconds in a quarrel. And remember, to satisfy in this sense is not to get for your friend all his vindictiveness requires, or to make him give

as little as the other demands, but to see that he does all that should of right be done.

His honour ! Yes ; but you cannot satisfy his honour by glutting his revenge : only by making him do right. And if he has erred or injured, in no possible way can you repair his honour or heal his shame, except by demanding that he shall make full acknowledgment. "I have erred : " it is very hard to say, but because it is hard, it is therefore manly. You are too proud to apologize, because it will give your adversary an advantage ? But remember the advantage is already given to him by the wrong that you have done, and every hour that you delay acknowledgment you retain your inferiority : you diminish the difference and your inferiority so soon as you dare to say, "I did wrong ; forgive me."

3. Plea—as servant of the same God (v. 17). Forgiveness is not merely a moral, but a religious duty. Now remember this was an argument which was only available in behalf of Jews. It could not have been pleaded for an Egyptian. Joseph might have been asked to forgive on grounds of humanity : but not by the sanctions of religion, if an Egyptian had offended him. For an Egyptian did not serve the God of his father.

How shall we apply that ? According to the spirit in which we do, we may petrify it into a maxim narrower than Judaism, or enlarge it into Christianity. If by "servants of the God of our fathers," we mean our own sect, party, church, and that we must forgive *them*, narrow indeed is the principle we have learnt from this passage. But Judaism was to preserve truth—Christianity to expand it. Christianity says, just as Judaism did, "Forgive the servants of the God." Its pleas are, "Forgive : for he is thy fellow-servant. Seventy times seven times forgive thy *brother*." But it expands that word "brother" beyond what the Law ever dreamed of—God is the Father of Man. If there be a soul for which Christ did not die, then that man you are not, on Judaistic principles, bound to forgive. If there be one whom the love of God does not embrace in the

Gospel family, then for that one *this* plea is unavailing. But if God be the Father of the Race, and if Christ died for all ; if the word "neighbour" means even an alien and a heretic ; then this plea, narrowed by the law to his nation, expands for us to all. Because the servant of our Maker and the child of our Father, therefore he must be forgiven, let him be whosoever he may.

II. Let us consider in the second place Joseph's forgiveness.

1. Joseph's forgiveness was shown by his renunciation of the office of avenger—"Am I in the place of God?" Now this we may make to convey a Christian or a heathen sense, as we read it. It might read—we often do read it—we often say it thus: "I will not avenge, because God will. If God did not, I would. But certain that He will do it, I can wait, and I will wait, long years. I will watch the reverses of fortune ; I will mark the progress of disease ; I will observe the error, failing, grief, loss ; and I will exult and say, 'I knew it, but my hand was not on him ; God has revenged me better than I could myself.'" This is the cold-blooded, fearful feeling that is sometimes concealed under Christian forgiveness. Do not try to escape the charge. That feeling your heart and mine have felt, when we thought we were forgiving, and were praised for it. That was *not* Joseph's meaning. Read it thus: "If God does not, dare I avenge? 'Am I in the place of God?' Dare I—

" 'Snatch from His hand the balance and the rod,
Rejudge His justice, be the God of God?'"

So speaks St. Paul, "Vengeance is mine." Therefore wait, sit still, and see God's wrath? No! "Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him ; if he thirst, give him drink." This is the Christian revenge.

I say not that there is no such thing as the duty of redressing wrongs, especially those of others. There is a keen sense of wrong, a mighty demand of the heart for

justice, which cannot be put aside. And he who cannot feel indignation against wrong cannot, in a manly way, forgive injury. But I say, the only revenge which is essentially Christian is that of retaliating by forgiveness. And he who has ever tasted that Godlike feeling of forbearance when insulted ; of speaking well of one who has slandered him (pleasure all the more exquisite if the slanderer does not know it) ; of doing service in requital of an injury : he, and only he, can know how it is possible for our frail Humanity, by abnegating the place of God the avenger, to occupy the place of God the absolver.

2. Joseph forgave, or facilitated forgiveness, by observing the good results of what had seemed so cruel (v. 20). Good out of evil—that is the strange history of this world, whenever we learn God's character. No thanks to you. Your sin dishonoured you, though it will honour God. By our intentions, and not by the results, are our actions judged. Remember this tenaciously : forgiveness becomes less difficult, your worst enemy becomes your best friend, if you transmute his evil by good. No one can really permanently injure us but ourselves. No one can dishonour us : Joseph was immured in a dungeon. They spat on Christ. Did that sully the purity of the one, or lower the Divine dignity of the other ?

3. He forgot the injury. He spake kindly to them, comforted them, and bade them fear not. An English proverb has joined forgiving and forgetting. No forgiveness is complete which does not join forgetfulness. You forgive only so far as you forget. But here we must explain : else we get into the common habit of using words without meaning. To forget, literally, is not a matter of volition. You can by will remember, you cannot by an act of will forget—you cannot give yourself a bad memory if you have a good one. In that sense, to forget is a foolish way of talking. And, indeed, to forget in the sense of oblivion would not be truly forgiving : for if we forgive only while we do not recollect, who shall ensure that with recollection hate shall not return ? More than that. In the parable of the forgiven debtor,

you remember his sin in this sense was not forgotten. Fresh sin waked up all the past. He was forgiven: then he was reminded of the past debt, and cast into prison. Not for his new offence, but for his old debt, was he delivered to the tormentors—it was not forgotten. But the true Christian forgiveness, as here in Joseph's example, is unconditional. Observe: he did not hold his brethren in suspense; he did not put them on their good behaviour; he did not say, "I hold this threat over you, if you do it again." That is forgiving and not forgetting. But that was a frank, full, free remission—consoling them—trying to make them forget—neither by look nor word showing memory, unless the fault had been repeated. It was unconditional, with no reserve behind. That was forgiving and forgetting.

To conclude. Forgiveness is the work of a long life to learn. This was at the close of Joseph's life. He would not have forgiven them in youth—not when the smart was fresh—ere he saw the good resulting from his suffering. But years, experience, trial, had softened Joseph's soul. A dungeon and a government had taught him much; also his father's recent death. Do not think that any formula will teach this. No mere maxims got by heart about forgiveness of injuries—no texts perpetually on the tongue will do this—God alone can teach it:—By experience; by a sense of human frailty; by a perception of "the soul of goodness in things evil;" by a cheerful trust in human nature; by a strong sense of God's Love; by long and disciplined realization of the atoning Love of Christ—only thus can we get that free, manly, large, princely spirit which the best and purest of all the patriarchs, Joseph, exhibited in his matured manhood.

THE ISRAELITE'S GRAVE IN A FOREIGN LAND¹

GENESIS I. 24-26.—“And Joseph said unto his brethren, I die : and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence. So Joseph died, being an hundred and ten years old : and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.”

THERE is a moment when a man's life is re-lived on earth. It is in that hour in which the coffin lid is shut down, just before the funeral, when earth has seen the last of him for ever. Then the whole life is, as it were, lived over again in the conversation which turns upon the memory of the departed. The history of threescore years and ten is soon

¹ *This Sermon was formerly published by the Author in a separate form, and the following Preface to that publication explains so well the circumstances under which all the other Sermons have been preserved, that it has been thought best to reprint the preface here.*

“For the publication of the common-place observations contained in the following pages, the common-place excuse may, perhaps, suffice, that printing was the simplest way of multiplying copies for a few friends who desired them. Perhaps, too, the uncommonness of the occasion may justify the writer in giving to an ephemeral discourse an existence somewhat less transient than the minutes spent in listening to it.”

“The Sermon is published as nearly as possible as it was spoken. It was written out concisely for a friend on the day of its delivery, with no intention of publication. Afterwards, it seemed better to leave it in that state, with only a few corrections, and the addition of a few sentences, than to attempt to re-write it after an interval too great to recall what had been said. This will account for the abruptness and want of finish which pervades the composition.

“The writer takes this opportunity of disowning certain sermons which have been published in his name. They would not have been worth notice, had not the innumerable blunders of thought and expression which they contain been read and accepted by several as his. For this reason he feels it due to himself to state that they are published without his sanction, and against his request, and that he is not responsible for either the language or the ideas.”

recapitulated : not, of course, the innumerable incidents and acts which they contained, but the central governing principle of the whole. Feverish curiosity sometimes spends itself upon the last hours ; and a few correct sentences, implying faith after the orthodox phraseology, would convey to some greater hope than a whole life breathing the Spirit of Christ, separate from such sentences. But it is not thus the Bible speaks. It tells us very little of the closing scene, but a great deal of the general tenor of a life. In truth, the closing scene is worth very little. The felon, who, up to the last fortnight, has shown his impenitence by the plea of not guilty, in the short compass of that fortnight makes a confession, as a matter of course, exhibits the externals of penitence, and receives the Last Supper. But it would be credulity, indeed, to be easily persuaded that the eternal state of such a one is affected by it. A life of holiness sometimes mysteriously terminates in darkness ; but it is not the bitterest cries of forsakenness, so often the result of physical exhaustion, nor even blank despair, that shall shake our deep conviction that he whose faith shone brightly through life, is now safe in the everlasting arms. The dying scene is worth little—little, at least, to us—except so far as it is in harmony with the rest of life.

It is for this reason that the public estimate, pronounced upon the departed, is generally a fair criterion of worth. There are, of course, exceptional cases—cases in which the sphere of action has been too limited for the fair development of the character, and nothing but the light of the Judgment day can reveal it in its true aspect—cases in which party spirit has defaced a name, and years are wanted to wash away the mask of false colour which has concealed the genuine features—cases in which the champion of truth expires amidst the execrations of his contemporaries, and after-ages build his sepulchre. These, however, are exceptions. For the most part, when all is over, general opinion is not far from truth. Misrepresentation and envy have no provocatives left them. What the departed was is tolerably well known in the circle in which he moved. The epitaph

may be falsified by the partiality of relations ; but the broad judgment of society reverses that, rectifies it, and pronounces with perhaps a rude, but on the whole, fair approximation to the truth.

These remarks apply to the history of the man whose final scene is recorded in the text. The verdict of the Egyptian world was worth much. Joseph had gone to Egypt, some years before, a foreigner ; had lived there in obscurity ; had been exposed to calumny ; by his quiet, consistent goodness, had risen, step by step, first to respect, then to trust, command, and veneration ; was embalmed after death in the affections, as well as with the burial rights, of the Egyptians ; and his honoured form reposed at last amidst the burial place of the Pharaohs.

In this respect the text branches into a two-fold division. The life of Joseph ; and the death which was in accordance with that life.

1. The history of Joseph, as of every man, has two sides—its outward circumstances and its inner life.

The outward circumstances were chequered with misfortune. Severed from his home in very early years, sold into slavery, cast into prison—at first, grief seemed to have marked him for her own. And this is human life. Part of its lot is misery. There are two inadequate ways of accounting for this mystery of sorrow. One, originating in zeal for God's justice, represents it as invariably the chastisement of sin, or at the least, as correction for fault. But, plainly, it is not always such. Joseph's griefs were the consequences, not of fault, but of rectitude. The integrity which, on some unknown occasion, made it his duty to carry his brethren's "evil report" to their father, was the occasion of his slavery. The purity of his life was the cause of his imprisonment. Fault is only a part of the history of this great matter of sorrow. Another theory, created by zeal for God's love, represents sorrow as the exception, and happiness as the rule of life. We are made for enjoyment, it is said, and on the whole there is more enjoyment than wretchedness. The common idea of Love being that which

identifies it with a simple wish to confer happiness, no wonder that a feeble attempt is made to vindicate God, by a reduction of the apparent amount of pain. Unquestionably, however, love is very different from a desire to shield from pain. Eternal Love gives to painlessness a very subordinate place in comparison of excellence of character. It does not hesitate to secure man's spiritual dignity at the expense of the sacrifice of his well-being. The solution will not do. Let us look the truth in the face. You cannot hide it from yourself. "Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upwards." Sorrow is not an accident, occurring now and then; it is the very woof which is woven into the warp of life. God has created the nerves to agonize, and the heart to bleed; and before a man dies, almost every nerve has thrilled with pain, and every affection has been wounded. The account of life which represents it as probation is inadequate: so is that which regards it chiefly as a system of rewards and punishments. The truest account of this mysterious existence seems to be that it is intended for the development of the soul's life, for which sorrow is indispensable. Every son of man who would attain the true end of his being must be baptized with fire. It is the law of our humanity, as that of Christ, that we must be perfected through suffering. And he who has not discerned the Divine Sacredness of Sorrow, and the profound meaning which is concealed in pain, has yet to learn what life is. The Cross, manifested as the Necessity of the Highest Life, alone interprets it.

2. Besides this, obloquy was part of Joseph's portion. His brethren, even his father, counted him a vain dreamer, full of proud imaginings. He languished long in a dungeon with a stain upon his character. He was subjected to almost all the bitterness which changes the milk of kindly feelings into gall: to Potiphar's fickleness, to slander, to fraternal envy, to the ingratitude of friendship in the neglect of the chief butler who left his prison, and straightway forgot his benefactor. Out of all which a simple lesson arises, "Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils." Yet that may be over-stated. Nothing chills the heart like universal

distrust. Nothing freezes the genial current of the soul so much as doubts of human nature. Human goodness is no dream. Surely we have met unselfishness, and love, and honour among men. Surely we have seen, and not in dreams, pure benevolence beaming from human countenances. Surely we have met with integrity that the world's wealth could not bribe; and attachment which might bear the test of any sacrifice. It is not so much the depravity as the frailty of men, that makes it impossible to count on them. Was it not excusable in Jacob, and even natural, if he attributed to vanity his son's relation of the dream in which the sun, and the moon, and the eleven stars, bowed down before him? Was it not excusable if Potiphar distrusted his tried servant's word, when his guilt appeared so indisputably substantiated? Was not even the chief butler's forgetfulness intelligible, when you remember his absorbing interest in his own danger, and the multiplied duties of his office? The world is not to be too severely blamed, if it misrepresents us. It is hard to reach the truth: very hard to sift a slander. Men who believe such rumours, especially in courtly life, may be ignorant, hasty, imperfect, but are not necessarily treacherous. Yet, even while you keep this in mind, that the heart may not be soured, remember, your dearest friend may fail you in the crisis; a truth of experience was wrapped up in the old fable, and the thing you have fostered in your bosom may wound you to the quick; the one you have trusted may become your Accuser, and throw his own blame with dastard meanness upon you. That was the experience of Joseph. Was not that His fate who trusted Judas? There is One, and but One, whose Love is as a rock, which will not fail you when you cling. It is a fearful, solitary feeling, that lonely truth of life; yet not without a certain strength and grandeur in it. The life that is the deepest and the truest will feel most vividly both its desolation and its majesty. We live and die alone. God and our own souls—we fall back upon them at last. "Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall

leave Me alone ; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me."

3. Success, besides, marked the career of Joseph. Let us not take half views of men and things. The woof of life is dark ; that we granted : but it is shot through a web of brightness. Accordingly, in Joseph's case, even in his worst days, you find a kind of balance, to be weighed against his sorrows. The doctrine of compensation is found through all. Amidst the schemings of his brothers' envy he had his father's love. In his slavery he had some recompense in feeling that he was gradually winning his master's confidence. In his dungeon he possessed the consciousness of innocence, and the grateful respect of his fellow-prisoners. In that beautiful hymn which some of you read last Sunday,¹ you may remember that a parallel is drawn between human life and the aspects of the weather. The morning rainbow, glittering among the dangerous vapours of the west, predicts that the day will not unclouded pass away. The evening rainbow declares that the storms are past, and that serene weather is setting in. Such is the life of all whom God disciplines. The morning or the evening brightness is the portion of a life, the rest of which is storm. Rarely are the manful struggles of principle in the first years of life suffered to be in vain. Joseph saw the early clouds which darkened the morning of his existence, pass away ; and the rainbow of heavenly peace arched over the calmness of his later years. "The Lord was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man." And it is for this special purpose it is written, "And Joseph saw Ephraim's children of the third generation ; the children also of Machir, the son of Manasseh, were brought up upon Joseph's knees." Long life, an honoured old age, a quiet grave ; these were the blessings reckoned desirable in Jewish modes of thought : and they are mentioned as evidences of Joseph's happiness.

And this, too, is Life. The sorrows of the past stand out most vividly in our recollections : because they are the

¹ Keble's Christian Year. Twenty-fifth Sunday after Trinity.

keenest of our sensations. At the end of a long existence we should probably describe it thus, "Few and evil have the days of the years of thy servant been." But the innumerable infinitesimals of happiness that from moment to moment made life sweet and pleasant are forgotten; and very richly has our Father mixed the materials of these with the homeliest actions and domesticities of existence. See two men meeting together in the streets; mere acquaintances. They will not be five minutes together before a smile will overspread their countenances, or a merry laugh ring of, at the lowest, amusement. This has God done. God created the smile and the laugh, as well as the sigh and the tear. The aspect of this life is stern; very stern. It is a very superficial account of it which slurs over its grave mystery, and refuses to hear its low, deep undertone of anguish. But there is enough, from hour to hour, of bright, sunny happiness, to remind us that its Creator's highest name is Love.

Now turn to the spirit of Joseph's inner life. First of all, that life was forgivingness. You cannot but have remarked that, conversant as his experience was with human treachery, no expressions of bitterness escape from him. No sentimental wailing over the cruelty of relations, the falseness of friendship, or the ingratitude of the world. No rancorous outburst of misanthropy: no sarcastic scepticism of man's integrity or woman's honour. He meets all bravely, with calm, meek, and dignified forbearance. If ever man had cause for such doubts, he had; yet his heart was never soured. At last, after his father's death, his brothers, apprehending his resentful recollections of their early cruelty, come to deprecate his revenge. Very touching is his reply. "Fear not: for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me: but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. Now therefore, fear ye not: I will nourish you and your little ones."

This is the Christian spirit before the Christian times. Christ was in Joseph's heart, though not definitely in Joseph's creed. The Eternal Word whispered in the souls of men

before It spoke articulately aloud in the Incarnation. It was the Divine Thought before it became the Divine Expression.¹ It was the Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world, before It blazed into the Day-spring from On high which visited us. The Mind of Christ, the Spirit of the years yet future, blended itself with life before He came ; for His words were the Eternal Verities of our Humanity. In all ages Love is the truth of life. Men cannot injure us except so far as they exasperate us to forget ourselves. No man is really dishonoured except by his own act. Calumny, injustice, ingratitude,—the only harm these can do us is by making us bitter or rancorous, or gloomy : by shutting our hearts or souring our affections. We rob them of their power if they only leave us more sweet and forgiving than before. And this is the only true victory. We win by love. Love transmutes all curses, and forces them to rain down in blessings. Out of the jealousy of his brothers Joseph extracted the spirit of forgiveness. Out of Potiphar's weak injustice, and out of the machinations of disappointed Passion, he created an opportunity of learning meekness. Our enemies became unconsciously our best friends, when their slanders deepen in us heavenlier graces. •Let them do their worst ; they only give us the God-like victory of forgiving them.

2. Distinguished from the outward circumstances, we find simplicity of character : partly in the willingness to acknowledge his shepherd father in Egypt, where the pastoral life was an abomination ; partly in that incidental notice which we have of the feast at which he entertained his brethren, where the Egyptians sat at a table by themselves, and Joseph by himself. So that, elevated as he was, his heart remained Hebrew still. He had contracted a splendid alliance, by marrying into one of the noblest families in Egypt, that of Potipherah the priest of On. And yet he had not forgotten his country, nor sought to be naturalized there. • His heart was in that far land where he had fed his father's flocks in his simple, genial boyhood. The divining cup of Egyptian

¹ Λόγος ἐνδιάθετος—πορφωρικὸς.

silver was on his table ; but he remembered the days when the only splendour he knew was that coat of many colours which was made for him by his father. He bore a simple, unsophisticated heart amidst the pomp of an Egyptian court.

There is a great mistake made on the subject of simplicity. There is one simplicity of circumstances : another simplicity of heart. These two must not be confounded. It is common to talk of the humble poor man, and the proud rich man. Let not these ideas be inseparably blended together. There is many a man who sits down to a meal of bread and milk on a wooden table whose heart is as proud as the proudest whose birth is royal. There is many a one whose voice is heard at the public meeting, loudly descanting on legal tyranny and aristocratic insolence, who in his own narrow circle is as much a tyrant as any oppressor who ever disgraced the throne. And there is many a man who sits down to daily pomp, to whom gold and silver are but as brass and tin, and who bears in the midst of it all a meek, simple spirit, and a "heart refrained as a weaned child." Many a man who lives surrounded with homage, and hearing the applause and flattery of men perpetually, on whose heart these things fall flat and dead, without raising one single emotion of fluttered vanity.

The world cannot understand this. They cannot believe that Joseph can be humble, while he is conscious of such elevation above the crowd of men, not even dreaming of it. They cannot understand how carelessly these outsides of life can be worn, and how they fall off like the unregarded and habitual dress of daily life. They cannot know how the spirit of the Cross can crucify the world, make grandeur painful, and calm the soul with a vision of the Eternal Beauty. They cannot dream how His life and death, once felt as the grandest, write mockery on all else, and fill the soul with an ambition which is above the world. It is not the unjewelled finger : nor the affectation of an almost quakerish simplicity of attire : nor the pedestrian mode of travelling : nor the scanty meal that constitute humility. It is that simple, inner life of real greatness, which is indifferent

to magnificence, and surrounded by it all, lives far away in the distant country of a Father's Home with the cross borne silently and self-sacrificingly in the heart of hearts.

3. One characteristic of Joseph's inner life remains—benevolence. It was manifested in the generosity with which he entertained his brethren, and in the discriminating tenderness with which he provided his best beloved brother's feast with extraordinary delicacies. These were traits of thoughtfulness. But further still. The prophetic insight of Joseph enabled him to foresee the approach of famine. He took measures accordingly; and when the famine came, the royal storehouses were opened, and every man in Egypt owed his life to the benevolent providence of the Hebrew stranger. It was productive of a great social revolution. It brought, by degrees, all the land of Egypt into the power of the crown, so that a kind of feudal system was established, every man holding in direct tenancy from the crown. Hence the nation became compacted into a new unity, and power was concentrated in the hands of government, partly by the pecuniary revenue thus added, and partly by the lustre of goodness which Joseph had thrown round the royal acts. For acts like these are the real bulwarks of a throne. One such man as Joseph does more to strengthen the crown than all the speculations, solemn or trifling, which were ever written on the "Divine right of kings." There is a right divine which requires no elaborate theory to make it felt.

II. The death of Joseph was in accordance with his life.

1. The funeral was a homage paid to goodness. Little is said in the text of Joseph's funeral. To know what it was, we must turn to the earlier part of the chapter, where that of Jacob is mentioned. A mourning of seventy days; a funeral whose imposing greatness astonished the Canaanites. They said, "This is a grievous mourning to the Egyptians." Seventy days were the time, or nearly so, fixed by custom for a royal funeral; and Jacob was so honoured, not for his own sake, but because he was Joseph's father. We cannot

The Israelite's Grave

suppose that Joseph's own obsequies were on a scale less grand.

Now, weigh what is implied in this. This was not the homage paid to talent, nor to wealth, nor to birth. Joseph was a foreign slave, raised to eminence by the simple power of goodness. Every man in Egypt felt, at his death, that he had lost a friend. There were thousands whose tears would fall when they recounted the preservation of lives dear to them in the years of famine, and felt that they owed those lives to Joseph. Grateful Egypt mourned the Good Foreigner; and, for once, the honours of this world were given to the graces of another.

2. We collect from this, besides, a hint of the resurrection of the body. The Egyptian mode of sepulture was embalming; and the Hebrews, too, attached much importance to the body after death. Joseph commanded his countrymen to preserve his bones to take away with them. In this we detect that unmistakable human craving, not only for immortality, but immortality associated with a form. No doubt, the Egyptian feeling was carried out absurdly. They tried to redeem from the worm the very aspect that had been worn, the very features they had loved; and there was a kind of feeling, that while that mummy lasted, the man had not yet perished from earth. They expected that, in process of years, it would again be animated by its spirit.

Now, Christianity does not disappoint, but rather meets, that feeling. It grants all that the materialist, and all that the spiritualist, have a right to ask. It grants to the materialist, by the doctrine of the resurrection, of the body, that future life shall be associated with a material form. Leaving untouched all the questions which may be raised about the identity of the atoms that have been buried, it simply pronounces that the spirit shall have a body. It grants to the spiritualist all he ought to wish, that the spirit shall be free from evil. For it is a mistake of ultra-spiritualism, to connect degradation with the thought of a risen body; or to suppose that a mind, unbound by the limitations of space, is a more spiritual idea of resurrection than the other.

The opposite to spirituality is not materialism, but sin. The form of matter does not degrade. For what is this world itself but the form of Deity, whereby the Manifolddness of His mind and Beauty manifests, and wherein it clothes itself? It is idle to say that spirit can exist apart from form. We do not know that it can. Perhaps even the Eternal Himself is more closely bound to His works than our philosophical systems have conceived. Perhaps matter is only a mode of thought. At all events, all that we know or can know of mind, exists in union with form. The resurrection of the body is the Christian verity, which meets and satisfies those cravings of the ancient Egyptian mind, that expressed themselves in the process of embalming, and the religious reverence felt for the very bones of the departed by the Hebrews.

Finally, in the last Will and Testament of Joseph, we find faith. He commanded his brethren, and through them, his nation, to carry his bones with them when they migrated to Canaan. In the Epistle to the Hebrews, that is reckoned an evidence of faith. "By faith Joseph gave commandment concerning his bones." How did he know that his people would ever quit Egypt? We reply, by faith. Not faith in a written word, for Joseph had no Bible; rather, faith in that conviction of his own heart, which is itself the substantial evidence of faith. For religious faith ever dreams of something higher, more beautiful, more perfect, than the state of things with which it feels itself surrounded. Ever a day future lies before it: the evidence for which is its own hope. Abraham, by that creative faith, saw the day of Christ, and was glad. Joseph saw his family in prosperity, even in affluence; but he felt that this was not their rest. A higher life than that of affluence—a nobler destiny than that of stagnant rest, there must be for them in the future; else all the anticipations of a purer earth, and a holier world, which imagination bodied forth within his soul, were empty dreams, not the intuitions of God's Spirit. It was this Idea of Perfection, which was "the substance of things hoped for," that carried him far beyond the period of his own death, and

made him feel himself a partaker of his nation's blessed future.

And that is the evidence of immortality. When the coffin is lowered into the grave, and the dull, heavy sound of earth falling on it is heard, there are some to whom that sound seems but an echo of their worst anticipations ; seems but to reverberate the idea of decay for ever, in the words, " Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust." There are others, to whom it sounds pregnant with the expectations of immortality, the " sure and certain hope of a resurrection to eternal life." The difference between these two feelings is measured by the difference of lives. They whose life is low and earthly, how can they believe in aught beyond the grave, when nothing of that life which is eternal has yet stirred within them ? They who have lived as Joseph lived, just in proportion to their purity and their unselfishness, must believe it. They cannot but believe it. The eternal existence is already pulsing in their veins ; the life of trust and high hope, and sublime longings after perfection, with which the decay of the frame has nothing at all to do. That is gone—yes—but it was not that life in which they lived ; and when it finished, what had that ruin to do with the destruction of the Immortal ?

For what is our proof of immortality ? Not the analogies of nature ; the resurrection of nature from a winter grave, or the emanipation of the butterfly. Not even the testimony to the fact of risen dead ; for who does not know how shadowy and unsubstantial these intellectual proofs become in unspiritual frames of mind ? No, the life of the Spirit is the evidence. " Heaven begun is the living proof that makes the heaven to come credible. " Christ in you is the hope of glory." It is the eagle eye of faith which penetrates the grave, and sees far into the tranquil things of death. He alone can believe in immortality, who feels the resurrection in him.

There is a special application to be made of this subject to our hearts. It is not often that the pulpit can be used for a funeral eulogium. Where Christ is to be exalted in solitary

pre-eminence, it is but rarely that the praise of man may be heard. Rank, Royalty itself could not command from the lips of a minister of the King of kings one syllable of adulatory, undeserved, or unfelt homage. But there are cases in which to loftiness of birth is added dignity of character; and then we gladly relax the rule, and pay a willing tribute to the majesty of Goodness. There is one to whom your thoughts must have reverted often during the history which we have been going through, suggesting a parallel, all the more delicately felt, from the absence of direct allusion. That royal Lady, for whose loss the marvellous uniformity of the unbroken funeral hue which pervades this congregation, tells eloquently of general mourning, came to this land a few years ago, like Joseph, a foreigner. Like Joseph, the earlier years of her sojourn were spent in comparative obscurity. Like Joseph, she had her share of calumny, though in a different form. There are many here who can remember that in that year when our political feuds had attained the acme of rancour, the irreverent lip of party slander dared to breathe its rank venom upon the name of one of the gentlest that ever adorned a throne. There are some who know how that unpopularity was met: with meekness—with Christian forgiveness—with quiet dignity—with that composure which is the highest result and evidence of strength. Like Joseph, she passed through the temptations of a court with unsullied spotlessness—like Joseph, the domestic and social relationships were sustained with beautiful fidelity—like Joseph, she lived down opposition, outlived calumny—like Joseph, she used the noble income entrusted to her, in acts of almost unexampled munificence—like Joseph, her life was chequered with sorrow, and when the clouds of earlier difficulties had cleared away, the rainbow sign of peace, even in the midst of broken health, spanned the calmness of her evening years—like Joseph, she will have a regal burial, and her ashes will repose with the dust of England's princes, amidst the mourning of the nation in which she found a home.

The homage which is given to her is not the homage

yielded to rank, or wealth, or genius. There will be silver on her coffin, and magnificence in the pageantry which attends her to the grave,¹ but it is not in these that the glory of her funeral lies. These were the privileges of the most profligate of her ancestors as well as her. These are the world's rewards for those whom she delights to honour. There will be something in her funeral, besides which these things are mean. There is a grandeur in a nation's tears; and they will be shed in unfeigned reverence over the remains of all that was most queenly, and all that was most womanly. No political fervour mixes with her obsequies. She stood identified with no party politics. No peculiar religious party mourns its patroness. Of all our jarring religious sects, in the Church, and out of it, not one dares to claim her as its own. Her spirit soared above these things. It is known that she scarcely recognised them. All was lost in the sublimer name of Christian. It is a *Christian* who has passed from this earth away, to take her place in the general Assembly and Church of the first-born: to stand before God, the Judge of all, among the spirits of the just made perfect.

One word more. Honouring the Queen, profoundly reverencing the Woman, let not contemplation stop there. Do not bury thought in the human and finite. Mildly as her lustre shone on earth, remember, it was but one feeble ray of the Light that is Uncreated. All that she had she received. If we honour her, it is to adore Him who made her what she was. Of His fulness she had received, and grace for grace. What she was she became through adoring faith in Christ. It is an elevating thing to gaze on human excellence, because through it the Highest becomes conceivable. It is a spirit-stirring thing to see saintly Goodness asserting its celestial origin by turning pale the lustre of the highest earthly rank. For in this universal mourning our

¹ This anticipation has not been realized. In one of the most touching and unaffected documents that ever went right home to English hearts, the Queen of a British Sovereign requested to be borne to the grave as the wife of a sailor.

noble country has not bowed the knee in reverence to the majesty which is of time. Every heart in England has felt that the Sovereign was merged in the servant of Christ. "The King's daughter was all glorious within." Hers was *Christian* goodness. Her eyes had beheld the King in His Beauty, and therefore her life was beautiful, and feminine, and meek, and simple. It was all derived beauty. She had robed herself in Christ. "Reflecting back, as from a burnished mirror, the glory of the Lord, she was changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."¹

THE ORPHANAGE OF MOSES

EXODUS ii. 6-9.—"And when she had opened it, she saw the child : and, behold, the babe wept. And she had compassion on him, and said, This is one of the Hebrews' children.—Then said his sister to Pharaoh's daughter, Shall I go and call to thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee?—And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, Go. And the maid went and called the child's mother.—And Pharaoh's daughter said unto her, Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages. And the woman took the child, and nursed it."

THIS is the account given of the discovery of a foundling orphan. Moses was an orphan—*ὀρφανός*, bereaved ; ordinarily it means one bereaved by death. But it matters not whether it is by death or otherwise ; it is truly an orphan if it be in any manner deprived of a parent's care. Here the child Moses was not bereaved by death, but by political circumstances.

In the book from whence our text is taken, we are told that three laws were enacted against the liberties of Israel :—

¹ 2 Cor. iii. 18. This appears to be the true force and rendering of the metaphor.

1. To keep down the population, the political economy of those days devised, as a preventive check, the slaughter of the males.

2. To prevent their acquiring any political importance, the officers set over them were Egyptians. No Israelite was eligible to any office—not even as a taskmaster.

3. To prevent their acquiring knowledge, they were prohibited from the slightest leisure: their lives were made bitter with hard bondage, in brick and mortar.

No penal statutes were ever more complete than these. If any penal statutes could have prevented the growth of this injured nation, these must have succeeded. Numerically limited, rendered politically insignificant, and intellectually feeble, the slavery of Israel was complete.

But wherever governments enact penal laws which are against the Laws of God, those governments or nations are, by the sure and inevitable process of revolution, preparing for themselves destruction. As when you compress yielding water, it bursts at last.

Pharaoh's laws were against all the laws of Nature, or, more properly speaking, against the Laws of God: and Nature was slowly working against Pharaoh. He had made God his enemy.

Against these laws of Pharaoh a mother's heart revolted. She hid her child for three months. Disobedience to this Egyptian law, we read, was faith in God—so says the Epistle to the Hebrews. "By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment" (Heb. xi. 23).

At last concealment was no longer possible, and the mother placed her child in an ark among the reeds of the river Nile. And there a foundling orphan he lay, who was to be the future emancipator and lawgiver of Israel.

In order to understand these verses, I divide them into two branches:—

56 The Orphanage of Moses

- I. The claims of the orphan.
- II. The orphan's education.

And first. By apparent accident, if there be such a thing in this world of God's, the daughter of Pharaoh came down to the river to wash, and, among the reeds, she saw the chest, in which lay the child.

Now the first claim put forward on her compassion was the claim of infancy.

The chest was opened. The princess "saw the child." That single sentence contains an argument. It was an appeal to the woman's heart. It mattered not that she was a princess, nor that she belonged to the proudest class of the most exclusive nation in the world. Rank, caste, nationality, all melted before the great fact of womanhood. She was a woman, and before her lay an outcast child.

Now, let us observe, that feeling which arose here was spontaneous. She did not feel compassion because it was her duty so to feel, but because it was her nature. The law of Egypt forbade her to feel so for a Hebrew child.

We commit a capital error when we make feeling a matter of command. To make feelings a subject of law destroys their beauty and spontaneity.

When we say ought—that a woman ought to feel so and so—we state a fact, not a command. We say that it is her nature, and that she is unnatural if she does not. There is something wrong—her nature is perverted. But no command can *make* her feel thus or thus. Law, applied to feeling, only makes hypocrites.

God has provided for Humanity by a plan more infallible than system, by implanting feeling in our natures. It was a heathen felt thus.

Do not fancy that Christianity created these feelings of tenderness and compassion by commanding them. Christianity declares them, commands them, and sanctions them, because they belong to man's unadulterated nature. Christianity acknowledges them, stamps them with the divine

seal ; but they existed before, and were found even among the Egyptians and Assyrians. What Christianity did for all these feelings was exactly what the creation of the sun, as given in the Mosaic account, did for the light then existing. There was light before, but the creation of the sun was the gathering all the scattered rays of light into one focus. Christian institutions, asylums, hospitals, are only the reduction into form of feelings that existed before.

So it is, that all that heathenism held of good and godlike, Christianity acknowledges and adopts—centralizes. It is human—Christian—ours.

2. Consider the degradation of this child's origin.

"This is one of the Hebrews' children." The exclusiveness of the Egyptian social system was as strong as that of the Hindoo. There was no intermixture between caste and caste—between priest and merchant. This child was, moreover, a Hebrew—a slave—an alien—reckoned an hereditary enemy, and to be crushed.

In these rigid feelings of caste distinction the princess was brought up. The voice of Society said, It is but a Hebrew. The mightier voice of nature—no, of God—spake within her, and said, It is a human being—bone of your bone, and sharing the same life.

That moment the princess of Egypt escaped from the trammels of time-distinctions and temporary narrowness, and stood upon the rock of the Eternal. So long as the feeling lasted, she breathed the spirit of that Kingdom in which there is "neither Jew nor Gentile, barbarian, Scythian, bond, nor free." So long as the feeling lasted, she breathed the atmosphere of Him who "came not to be ministered unto but to minister."

She was animated by His spirit Who came to raise the abject, to break the bond of the oppressor. She felt as He felt, when she recognized that the very degradation of the child was a claim upon her royal compassion.

3. The last reason we find for this claim was its unprotected state :—it wept.

Those tears told of a conscious want—the felt want of a

mother's arms. But they suggested to the Egyptian princess the remembrance of a danger of which the child was unconscious—helpless exposure to worse evils—famine ; the Nile flood ; the crocodile. And the want of which the exposed child was conscious was far less than the danger of which it was unconscious.

Such is the state of orphanage. Because it is unprotected, it is therefore exposed to terrible evils. There are worse evils than the Nile, the crocodile, or starvation.

Suppose the child had lived. Then, as a boy in the hands of a taskmaster or slave-driver, he would have become callous, hard, and vicious, with every feeling of tenderness dried up. Nothing can replace a parent's tenderness. It is not for physical support merely that parents are given us, but for the formation of the heart. He wept now ; but the fountain of the orphan's tears would have been withered and dried up, and instead of the tender man which he afterwards became, he would have become a hard-hearted slave.

Let us suppose again the case of a girl orphaned. Then you have the danger infinitely multiplied. There would have been no one in all the land of Egypt to redress the wrongs done to a Hebrew maiden. There are men in this world to whom, putting religion out of the question even, the very fact of wanting protection is cause sufficient for them to render protection. There are men to whom defencelessness is its own all-sufficient plea :—there are men in whose presence the woman and the orphan, just because they are unshielded by any care, are protected more than they could be by any laws.

But remember, I pray you, that there is another spirit in the world—the spirit of oppression, and even worse ; the spirit against which Jewish prophets rose to the height of a divine eloquence when they pleaded the cause of the fatherless and the widow ; that spirit which in our own day makes the daughter of the poor man less safe than the daughter of the rich ; that spirit of seduction, than which there is nothing more cowardly, more selfish, more damnable. For

alas ! it is true that to say that a girl is unprotected, fatherless, and poor, is almost equivalent to saying that she will fall into sin.

II. We pass on now to consider the orphan's education ; and first I notice that it was a suggestion from another.

The princess felt compassion, and so far was in the state of one who has warm feelings, but does not know how to do good. Brought up in a court, born to be waited on, nursed in luxury, ignorant of life and how the poor lived, those feelings might have remained helpless feelings.

Then, in the providence of God, one stood by who offered a suggestion how she might benefit the child, "Shall I go and call a nurse?" In other words, she suggested that it would be a princely and noble thing for Pharaoh's daughter to adopt and educate it.

And now observe the value of such a suggestion :—what we want is not feeling—emotions are common, feelings superabound. In the educated classes, feeling is extremely refined, but is much occupied with imaginary and unreal troubles ; and the reason why, with such warm feelings so little good is done, is that we want the suggestion how to do it.

Observe how differently the Bible treats this from what the painter or the novelist would have done. A painter would have shown the majesty and beauty of the royal actor. A romance would have given a touching history of womanly sentiment. But the Bible, being a real book, says little of the emotion—merely mentions it—and passes on to the act to which the feeling was meant to lead.

Brethren, we often make a mistake here ; we are proud of our emotions, of our refined feeling, of our quick sensibilities ; but remember, I pray you, feeling by itself is worthless—it is meant to lead to action, and if it fails to do this, it is a danger rather than a blessing ; for excited feeling that stops short of deeds is the precursor of callousness and hardness of heart. Your sensibility is well—but what has it *done* ?

The Orphanage of Moses

We feel the orphans' claims, and now comes the question, how shall we do them good?

Let us observe that Moses was nursed by a Hebrew matron. She was one of his own grade. It would have been a capital error to have given him to an Egyptian nurse. Probably, the princess left to herself would have done so. But then he would have been weaned from his own race. In heart, sympathies, feelings, he would have been an Egyptian. Nay, he would have been more exclusive; for the hardest are almost always those who have been raised above their former position. The slave's hardest taskmaster is a negro. The one who is most exclusive in his sympathies is usually the raised merchant, or the one recently ennobled.

The great thing is to emancipate the degraded through their own class. Only through their own class can they be effectually delivered; the mere patronage of the great and rich injures character.

So it was with Judaism; so it was with Christianity. The Redeemer was made of a woman—"born under the law to redeem them that were under the law." He who came to preach the Gospel to the poor, was born of a poor woman.

But it was not only a Hebrew nurse to whom Moses was given, it was a mother—his own mother—who nursed him; and from her he heard the story of his people's history. From her he learned to feel his country's wrongs to be his own. In the splendour of Pharaoh's court he never could forget that his mother was a slave, and that his father was working in brick and mortar, under cruel taskmasters.

From the princess he gained the wisdom of Egypt—he was taught legislative science. From hardship, he learned endurance and patience. Instruction ends in the school-room, but education ends only with life. A child is given to the universe to educate.

Now let us see the results of this training on his intellectual and moral nature.

1. Intellectually. We will only notice the spirit of

The Orphanage of Moses

61

inquiry and habit of observation. To ask "Why?" is the best Christian lesson for a child. Not the "*why*" which is the language of disobedience, but that "*why*" which demands for all phenomena a cause. It was this which led Moses on Mount Horeb to say, "I will turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burned." So it was that Moses found out God.

2. In the moral part of his character we note his hatred of injustice and cruelty; ever was he found ranged against oppression in whatever form it might appear. He stood ever on the side of Right against Might, whether it was to avenge the wrong done by the Egyptian to one of his Hebrew brethren, or to rescue the daughter of the priest of Midian from the oppressing shepherds. He became, too, a peacemaker. Thus we get a glimpse of the moral and intellectual nature of the man who afterwards led Israel out of Egyptian bondage, and who, but for the education he had received, might have become as degraded as any of the nation he freed from slavery.

At the present day, that child who might have become so degraded, stands second but to One in dignity and influence in the annals of the human race. Take, for one example, the Jewish Sabbath. Thousands upon thousands of that nation, fond of gain and mammon as they proverbially are said to be, yet gave up their gains yesterday, and voluntarily surrendered that one day in addition to this day which, by the law of the land, they are obliged to keep holy. And all this in obedience to the enactments of that orphan child, who three thousand years ago commanded the Sabbath-day to be kept holy. In those days the Pharaohs of Egypt raised their memorials in the enduring stone of the Pyramids, which still remain almost untouched by time. A princess of Egypt raised her memorial in a human spirit, and just so far as spirit is more enduring than stone, just so far is the work of that princess more enduring than the work of the Pharaohs; for when the day comes when those Pyramids shall have crumbled into nothingness and ruin, then shall the spirit of the laws of Moses still remain inter-

woven with the most hallowed of human institutions. So long as the spirit of Moses influences this world, so long shall her work endure, the work of that royal-hearted lady who adopted this Hebrew orphan child.

It now only remains for me to say a word on the claims of that institution for which I am to plead to-day—the Female Orphan Asylum in this town. It was established in 1823, and for years its funds flourished; lately they have fallen off considerably, and that not in consequence of fault in the institution itself, but simply for this cause, that of those who took it up warmly once, many have been removed by death, and many have altered their place of residence, and also because many fresh calls and institutions have come forward, and thus have excluded this one. The consequence has been a sad falling off of funds. Last year the expenditure exceeded the receipts by one hundred pounds.

Within the walls of that institution, now almost dilapidated and falling into decay, there are twenty-four female orphan children, received from the age of six to sixteen; not educated above their station, but educated simply to enable them “to do their duty in that state of life to which it has pleased God to call them.”

And now I earnestly desire to appeal to you for this object by the thoughts that have to-day been brought before you. Because they are children, I make an appeal to every mother's and woman's heart; because they are females, young and unprotected, I make an appeal to the heart of every man who knows and feels the evils of society: because they belong to the lowest class, I make an appeal to all who have ever felt the infinite preciousness of the fact that the Saviour of this world was born a poor man's child.

My beloved Christian brethren, let us not be content with feeling; give, I pray you, as God has prospered you.

PERVERSION AS SHOWN IN THE CHARACTER
OF BALAAM

NUMBERS xxii. 34, 35.—“And Balaam said unto the angel of the Lord, I have sinned; for I knew not that thou stoodest in the way against me: now therefore, if it displease thee, I will get me back again.—And the angel of the Lord said unto Balaam, Go with the men: but only the word that I shall speak unto thee, that thou shalt speak. So Balaam went with the princes of Balak.”

THE judgment which we form on the character of Balaam is one of unmitigated condemnation. We know and say that he was a false prophet and a bad man. This is however, doubtless, because we come to the consideration of his history having already prejudged his case.

St. Peter, St. Jude, and St. John have passed sentence upon him. “Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls: an heart they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed children: which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness, but was rebuked for his iniquity: the dumb ass speaking with man’s voice forbade the madness of the prophet.”—2 Peter ii. 14, 15, 16. “Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core.”—Jude 11. “But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.”—Rev. ii. 14. And so we read the history of Balaam familiar with these passages, and colouring all with them.

But assuredly this is not the sentence we should have pronounced, if we had been left to ourselves, but one much less severe. Repulsive as Balaam’s character is when it is seen at a distance, when it is seen near it has much in it that is human, like ourselves, inviting compassion—even

admiration: there are traits of firmness, conscientiousness, nobleness.

For example, in the text, he offers to retrace his steps as soon as he perceives that he is doing wrong. He asks guidance of God before he will undertake a journey: "And he said unto them, Lodge here this night, and I will bring you word again, as the Lord shall speak unto me." He professes—and in earnest—"If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more." He prays to "die the death of the righteous, and that his last end may be like his." Yet the inspired judgment of his character as a whole, stands recorded as one of unmeasured severity.

And accordingly one of the main lessons in Balaam's history must ever be, to trace how it is that men, who to the world appear respectable, conscientious, honourable, gifted, religious, may be in the sight of God accursed, and heirs of perdition. Our subject then to-day is Perversion:

I. Perversion of great gifts.

II. Perversion of the conscience.

I. Of great gifts. The history tells of Balak sending to Pethor for Balaam to curse the Israelites. This was a common occurrence in ancient history. There was a class of men regularly set apart to bless and curse, to spell-bind the winds and foretell events. Balaam was such an one.

Now, the ordinary account would be that such men were impostors, or endued with political sagacity, or had secret dealings with the devil. But the Bible says Balaam's inspiration was from God.

It did not arise from diabolical agency, or from merely political sagacity:—that magnificent ode of sublime poetry, given in chap. xxiv., is from God.

The Bible refers the inspiration of the poet, of the prophet, of the worker in cunning workmanship, to God. It makes no mention of our modern distinction between that inspiration enjoyed by the sacred writers and that enjoyed by ordinary men, except so far as the use is con-

cerned. God's prophets glorified Him. The wicked prophets glorified themselves ; but their inspiration was real, and came from God, and these divine powers were perverted—

1. By turning them to purposes of self-aggrandisement.

Now, remember how the true prophets of Jehovah spoke. Simply, with no affectation of mystery, no claims to mystical illumination. They delighted to share their power with their fellows ; they said "the heart of the Lord was with them that fear Him ;" that the Lord "dwelt with a humble and contrite heart." They represented themselves as inspired, not because greater or wiser than their brethren, but because more weak, more humble, and dependent upon God.

Contrast Balaam's conduct. Everything is done to show the difference between him and others—to fix men's attention upon himself—the wonderful, mysterious man who is in communication with heaven. He builds altars, and uses enchantments. These were a priest's manœuvres, not a prophet's.

He was the solitary self seeker—alone, isolated, loving to be separated from all other men ; admired, feared, and sought.

Balak struck the key-note of his character when he said, "Am I not able to promote thee unto honour?" Herein then, lies the first perversion of glorious gifts : that Balaam sought not God's honour but his own.

2. By making those gifts subservient to his own greed.*

It is evident that Balaam half suspected his own failing. Otherwise what mean those vaunts, "If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold?" Brave men do not vaunt their courage, nor honourable men their honesty, nor do the truly noble boast of high birth. All who understand the human heart perceive a secret sense of weakness in these loud boasts of immaculate purity. Silver and gold, these were the things he loved, and so, not content with communion with God, with the possession of sublime gifts, he thought these only valuable so far as they were means of putting himself in possession of riches. Thus spiritual powers were degraded to make himself a vulgar man of wealth.

There are two opposite motives which sway men. Some, like Simon Magus, will give gold to be admired and wondered at ; some will barter honour for gold. In some, the two are blended, as in Balaam, we see the desire for honour and wealth ; wealth, perhaps, as being another means of ensuring reputation. And so have we seen many begin and end in our own day—begin with a high-minded courage which flatters none ; speaks truth, even unpalatable truth ; but when this advocacy of truth brings men, as it brought to Balaam, to consult them, and they rise in the world, or in a court, and become men of consideration, then by degrees the plain truth is sacrificed to a feverish love of notoriety, the love of truth is superseded, and passes into a love of influence.

Or they begin with a generous indifference to wealth—simple, austere ; by degrees they find the society of the rich leading them from extravagance to extravagance, till, at last, high intellectual and high spiritual powers become the servile instruments of appropriating gold. The world sees the sad spectacle of the man of science and the man of God waiting at the doors of princes, or cringing before the public for promotion and admiration.

II. Perversion of Conscience.

1. The first intimation we have of the fact that Balaam was tampering with his conscience, is in his second appeal to God. On the first occasion God said, "Thou shalt not go with them ; thou shalt not curse the people ; for they are blessed." Then more honourable messengers were sent from Balak with larger bribes. Balaam asks permission of God again. Here is the evidence of a secret hollowness in his heart, however fair the outside seemed. In worldly matters, "think twice ;" but in duty, it has been well said, "first thoughts are best ;" they are more fresh, more pure, have more of God in them. There is nothing like the first glance we get at duty, before there has been any special pleading of our affections or inclinations. Duty is never uncertain at first. It is only after we

have got involved in the mazes and sophistries of wishing that things were otherwise than they are that it seems indistinct. Considering a duty, is often only explaining it away. Deliberation is often only dishonesty. God's guidance is plain, when we are true.

Let us understand in what Balaam's hollowness consisted. He wanted to please himself without displeasing God. The problem was how to go to Balak, and yet not to offend God. He would have given worlds to get rid of his duty ; and he went to God to get his duty altered, not to learn what his duty was. All this rested upon an idea that the Will of God *makes* right, instead of *being* right—as if it were a caprice which can be altered, instead of the Law of the universe, which cannot alter.

How deeply this principle is ingrained in human nature you may see from the Roman Catholic practice of indulgences. The Romish Church permits transgressions for a consideration, and pardons them for the same. Such a doctrine never could have succeeded if the desire and belief were not in man already. What Balaam was doing in this prayer was simply purchasing an indulgence to sin.

2. The second stage is a state of hideous contradictions : God permits Balaam to go, and then is angry with him for going. There is nothing here which cannot be interpreted by bitter experience. We must not explain it away by saying that these were only the alternations of Balaam's own mind. They were ; but they were the alternations of a mind with which God was expostulating, and to which God appeared differently at different times ; the horrible mazes and inconsistencies of a spirit which contradicts itself, and strives to disobey the God whom yet it feels and acknowledges. To such a state of mind God becomes a contradiction. "With the froward"—oh, how true !—"thou wilt show thyself froward." God speaks once, and if that voice be not heard, but is wilfully silenced, the second time it utters a terrible permission. God says, "Go," and then is angry. Experience will tell us how God has sent us to reap the fruit of our own wilfulness.

3. We notice next the evidences in him of a disordered mind and heart.

We come now to the most difficult portion of the story : "The dumb ass, speaking with man's voice, forbade the madness of the prophet." One of the most profound and pious of modern commentators, on this passage, has not scrupled to represent the whole transaction as occurring in a vision. Others have thought that Balaam's own heart, smiting him for his cruelty, put, as it were, words into the ass's mouth. We care not. Let the caviller cavil if he will. There is too much profound truth throughout this narrative for us to care much about either the literal or the figurative interpretation. One thing, however, is clear. Balaam did only what men so entangled always do. The real fault is in themselves. They have committed themselves to a false position, and when obstacles stand in their way, they lay the blame on circumstances. They smite the dumb innocent occasion of their perplexity as if it were the cause. And the passionateness—the "madness" of the act is but an indication that all is going wrong within. There was a canker at the heart of Balaam's life, and his equanimity was gone ; his temper vented itself on brute things. Who has not seen the like—a grown man, unreasoning as a child, furious beyond the occasion ? If you knew the whole, you would see *that* was not the thing which had moved him so terribly ; you would see that all was wrong inwardly.

It is a strange, sad picture this. The first man in the land, gifted beyond most others, conscious of great mental power, going on to splendid prospects, yet with hopelessness and misery working at his heart. Who would have envied Balaam if he could have seen all—the hell that was working at his heart ?

Lastly, let us consider the impossibility under such circumstances of going back. Balaam offers to go back. The angel says, "Go on." There was yet one hope for him, to be true, to utter God's words careless of the consequences ; but he who had been false so long, how should he be true ? It was too late. In the ardour of youth you have made

Selfishness in Balaam's Character 69

perhaps a wrong choice, or chosen an unfit profession, or suffered yourself weakly and passively to be drifted into a false course of action, and now, in spite of yourself, you feel there is no going back. To many minds, such a lot comes as with the mysterious force of a destiny. They see themselves driven, and forget that they put themselves in the way of the stream that drives them. They excuse their own acts as if they were coerced. They struggle now and then faintly, as Balaam did—try to go back—cannot—and at last sink passively in the mighty current that floats them on to wrong.

And thenceforth to them all God's intimations will come *unnaturally*. His voice will sound as that of an angel against them in the way. Spectral lights will gleam, only to show a quagmire from which there is no path of extrication. The heavenliest things and the meanest will forbid the madness of the prophet: and yet at the same time seem to say to the weak and vacillating self-seeker, "You have done wrong, and you must do more wrong." Then deepens down a hideous, unnatural, spectral state—the incubus as of a dream of hell, mixed with bitter reminiscences of heaven.

Your secret faults will come out in your life. Therefore, we say to you—be true.

SELFISHNESS, AS SHOWN IN BALAAM'S CHARACTER

NUMBERS xxiii. 10.—"Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth *part* of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!"

WE acquainted ourselves with the earlier part of Balaam's history last Sunday. We saw how great gifts in him were perverted by ambition and avarice—ambition making them subservient to the admiration of himself; avarice transforming them into mere instruments for accumulating wealth. And we saw how his conscience was gradually

70 Selfishness in Balaam's Character

perverted by insincerity, till his mind became the place of hideous contradictions, and even God Himself had become to him a lie; with his heart disordered, until the bitterness of all going wrong within, vented itself on innocent circumstances, and he found himself so entangled in a false course that to go back was impossible.

Now we come to the second stage. He has been with Balak: he has built his altars, offered his sacrifices, and tried his enchantments, to ascertain whether Jehovah will permit him to curse Israel. And the Voice in his heart, through all, says "Israel is blest." He looks down from the hill-top, and sees the fair camp of Israel afar off, in beautiful array, their white tents gleaming "as the trees of lign aloes which the Lord hath planted." He feels the solitary grandeur of a nation unlike all other nations—people which "shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations." A nation too numberless to give Balak any hope of success in the coming war. "Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel?" A nation too strong in righteousness for idolaters and enchanters to cope with. "Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel?" Then follows a personal ejaculation:—"Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!"

Now, to prevent the possibility of misconception, or any supposition that Balaam was expressing words whose full significance he did not understand—that when he was speaking of righteousness, he had only a heathen notion of it—we refer to the sixth chapter of Micah, from the fifth verse. We will next refer to Numbers xxxi. 8, and Joshua xiii. 22, from whence it appears that he who desired to die the death of the righteous, died the death of the ungodly, and fell, not on the side of the Lord, but fighting against the Lord's cause. The first thing we find in this history of Balaam is an attempt to change the will of God.

Let us clearly understand what was the meaning of all those reiterated sacrifices.

1. Balaam wanted to please himself without displeasing

Selfishness in Balaam's Character 71

God. The problem was how to go to Balak, and yet not offend God. He would have given worlds to get rid of his duties, and he sacrificed, not to learn what his duty was, but to get his duty altered. Now see the feeling that lay at the root of all this—that God is mutable. Yet of all men one would have thought that Balaam knew better, for had he not said, “God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent: hath He said, and shall He not do it?” But, when we look upon it, we see Balaam had scarcely any feeling higher than this—God is more inflexible than man. Probably had he expressed the exact shade of feeling, he would have said, more obstinate. He thought that God had set His heart upon Israel, and that it was hard, yet not impossible, to alter this partiality. Hence he tries sacrifices to bribe, and prayers to coax, God.

How deeply rooted this feeling is in human nature—this belief in God's mutability—you may see from the Romish doctrine of indulgences and atonements. The Romish Church permits crime for certain considerations. For certain considerations it teaches that God will forgive crimes. Atonements after, and indulgences before sin, are the same. But this Romish doctrine never could have succeeded, if the belief in God's mutability and the *desire* that He should be mutable, were not in man already.

What Balaam was doing in these parables, and enchantments, and sacrifices, was simply purchasing an indulgence to sin; in other words, it was an attempt to make the Eternal Mind change. What was wanting for Balaam to feel was this—God *cannot* change. What he did feel was this—God *will* not change. There are many writers who teach that this and that is right because God has willed it. All discussion is cut short by the reply, God has determined it, therefore it is right. Now there is exceeding danger in this mode of thought, for a thing is not right because God has willed it, but God wills it because it is right. It is, in this tone the Bible always speaks. Never, except in one obscure passage, does the Bible seem to refer right and

72 Selfishness in Balaam's Character

wrong to the sovereignty of God, and declare it a matter of will : never does it imply that if He so chose, He could reverse evil and good. It says, "Is not my way equal? are not your ways unequal?" "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" was Abraham's exclamation in a kind of hideous doubt whether the Creator might not be on the eve of doing injustice. So the Bible *justifies* the ways of God to man. But it could not do so unless it admitted Eternal Laws, with which no will can interfere. Nay more, see what ensues from this mode of thought. If Right is right because God wills it, then if God chose, He could make injustice, and cruelty, and lying to be right. This is exactly what Balaam thought. If God could but be prevailed on to hate Israel, then for him to curse them would be right. And again : if power and sovereignty make right, then, supposing that the Ruler were a demon, devilish hatred would be as right as now it is wrong. There is great danger in some of our present modes of thinking. It is a common thought that Might makes Right, but for us there is no rest, no rock, no sure footing, so long as we feel right and wrong are mere matters of will and decree. There is no safety then, from these hankering feelings and wishes to alter God's decree. You are unsafe until you feel, "Heaven and earth may pass away, but God's word cannot pass away."

2. We notice, secondly, an attempt to blind himself. One of the strangest leaves in the book of the human heart is here turned. We observe here perfect veracity with utter want of truth. Balaam was veracious. He will not deceive Balak. Nothing was easier than to get the reward by muttering a spell, knowing all the while that it would not work. Many an European has sold incantations to rich savages for jewels and curiosities, thus enriching himself by deceit. Now Balaam was not supernaturally withheld. That is a baseless assumption. Nothing withheld him but his conscience. No bribe on earth could induce Balaam to say a falsehood—to pretend a curse which was powerless—to get gold, dearly as he loved it, by a pretence. "If Balak would give me his house full of silver

Selfishness in Balaam's Character 73

and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord my God, to do less or more," was no mere fine saying, but the very truth. You might as soon have turned the sun from his course as induced Balaam to utter falsehood.

And yet, with all this, there was utter truthlessness of heart. Balaam will not utter what is not true; but he will blind himself so that he may not see the truth, and so speak a lie, believing it to be the truth.

He will only speak the thing he feels; but he is not careful to feel all that is true. He goes to another place, where the whole truth may not force itself upon his mind—to a hill where he shall not see the whole of Israel: from hill to hill for the chance of getting to a place where the truth may disappear. But there stands the stubborn fact—Israel is blessed; and he will look at the fact in every way, to see if he cannot get it into a position where it shall be seen no longer. Ostrich like!

Such a character is not so uncommon as, perhaps, we think. There is many a lucrative business which involves misery and wrong to those who are employed in it. The man would be too benevolent to put the gold in his purse if he knew of the misery. But he takes care not to know. There is many a dishonourable thing done at an election, and the principal takes care not to inquire. Many an oppression is exercised on a tenantry, and the landlord receives his rent, and asks no questions. Or there is some situation which depends upon the holding of certain religious opinions, and the candidate has a suspicion that if he were to examine, he could not conscientiously profess these opinions, and perchance he takes care not to examine.

3. Failing in all these evil designs against Israel, Balaam tries his last expedient to ruin them, and that partially succeeds.

He recommends Balak to use the fascination of the daughters of Moab to entice the Israelites into idolatry.—(Numbers xxxi. 15, 16. Rev. ii. 14.) He has tried enchantments and sacrifices in vain to reverse God's Will. He has tried in vain to think that Will is reversed. •It will

74 Selfishness in Balaam's Character

not do. He feels at last that God has not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath He seen perverseness in Israel. Now therefore, he tries to reverse the character of these favourites, and so to reverse God's Will. God will not curse the good ; therefore Balaam tries to make them wicked ; he tries to make the good curse themselves and so exasperate God.

A more diabolical wickedness we can scarcely conceive. Yet Balaam was an honourable man and a veracious man ; nay, a man of delicate conscientiousness and unconquerable scruples—a man of lofty religious professions, highly respectable and respected. The Lord of heaven and earth has said there is such a thing as “straining out a gnat, and swallowing a camel.”

There are men who would not play false, and yet would wrongly win. There are men who would not lie, and yet who would bribe a poor man to support a cause which he believes in his soul to be false. There are men who would resent at the sword's point the charge of dishonour, who would yet for selfish gratification entice the weak into sin, and damn body and soul in hell. There are men who would be shocked at being called traitors, who in time of war will yet make a fortune by selling arms to their country's foes. There are men respectable and respected, who give liberally and support religious societies, and go to church, and would not take God's name in vain, who have made wealth, in some trade of opium or spirits, out of the wreck of innumerable human lives. Balaam is one of the accursed spirits now, but he did no more than these are doing.

Now see what lay at the root of all this hollowness :—Selfishness.

From first to last one thing appears uppermost in this history—Balaam's self ;—the honour of Balaam as a true prophet—therefore he will not lie ; the wealth of Balaam—therefore the Israelites must be sacrificed. Nay more, even in his sublimest visions his egotism breaks out. In the sight of God's Israel he cries, “Let *me* die the death of the righteous :” in anticipation of the glories of the Eternal

Selfishness in Balaam's Character 75

Advent, "*I shall behold Him, but not nigh.*" He sees the vision of a Kingdom, a Church, a chosen people, a triumph of righteousness. In such anticipations, the nobler prophets broke out into strains in which their own personality was forgotten. Moses, when he thought that God would destroy His people, prays in agony—"Yet now, if Thou wilt, forgive their sin;—and if not, blot me, I pray Thee, out of Thy book." Paul speaks in impassioned words—"I have continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites." But Balaam's chief feeling seems to be, "How will all this advance *me*?" And the magnificence of the prophecy is thus marred by a chord of melancholy and diseased egotism. Not for one moment—even in those moments when uninspired men gladly forget themselves; men who have devoted themselves to a monarchy or dreamed of a republic in sublime self-abnegation—can Balaam forget himself in God's cause.

Observe then: desire for personal salvation is not religion. It *may* go with it, but it is not religion. Anxiety for the state of one's own soul is not the healthiest or best symptom. Of course every one wishes, "Let me die the death of the righteous." But it is one thing to wish to be saved, another to wish God's right to triumph;—one thing to wish to die safe, another to wish to live holily. Nay, not only is this desire for personal salvation not religion, but if soured, it passes into hatred of the good. Balaam's feeling became spite against the people who are to be blessed when he is not blessed. He indulges a wish that good may not prosper, because personal interests are mixed up with the failure of good.

We see anxiety about human opinion is uppermost. Throughout we find in Balaam's character semblances, not realities. He would not transgress a rule, but he would violate a principle. He would not say white was black, but he would sully it till it looked black.

Now consider the whole.

A bad man prophesies under the fear of God, restrained

76 Selfishness in Balaam's Character

by conscience, full of poetry and sublime feelings, with a full clear view of death as dwarfing life, and the blessedness of righteousness as compared with wealth. And yet we find him striving to disobey God, hollow and unsound at heart; using for the devil wisdom and gifts bestowed by God; sacrificing all with a gambler's desperation, for name and wealth: tempting a nation to sin, and crime, and ruin; separated in selfish isolation from all mankind; superior to Balak, and yet feeling that Balak knew him to be a man that had his price; with the bitter anguish of being despised by the men who were inferior to himself; forced to conceive of a grandeur in which he had no share, and a righteousness in which he had no part. Can you not conceive the end of one with a mind so torn and distracted?—the death in battle; the insane frenzy with which he would rush into the field, and finding all go against him, and that lost for which he had bartered heaven, after having died a thousand worse than deaths, find death at last upon the spears of the Israelites?

In application, we remark first, the danger of great powers. It is an awful thing, this conscious power to see more, to feel more, to know more than our fellows.

2. But let us mark well the difference between feeling and doing.

It is possible to have sublime feelings, great passions, even great sympathies with the race, and yet not to love man. To feel mightily is one thing, to live truly and charitably another. Sin may be felt at the core, and yet not be cast out. Brethren, beware. See how a man may be going on uttering fine words, orthodox truths, and yet be rotten at the heart.

THE CHARACTER OF ELI

I SAMUEL. iii. 1.—“And the child Samuel ministered unto the Lord before Eli. And the word of the Lord was precious in those days; *there was no open vision.*”

It is impossible to read this chapter without perceiving that it draws a marked contrast between the two persons of whom it speaks—Eli and Samuel.

1. They are contrasted in point of years: for the one is a boy, the other a grey-headed old man; and if it were for only this, the chapter would be one of deep interest. For it is interesting always to see a friendship between the old and the young. It is striking to see the aged one retaining so much of freshness and simplicity as not to repel the sympathies of boyhood. It is surprising to see the younger one so advanced and thoughtful, as not to find dull the society of one who has outlived excitability and passion. This is the picture presented in this chapter. A pair of friends—childhood and old age standing to each other in the relationship, not of teacher and pupil, but of friend and friend.

2. They are contrasted again in point of office. Both are judges of Israel. But Eli is a judge rendering up his trust, and closing his public career. Samuel is a judge entering upon his office: and the outgoing ruler Eli, is placed under very novel and painful circumstances in reference to his successor. He receives God's sentence of doom from the lips of the child he has taught, and the friend he has loved. The venerable judge of forty years is sentenced by the judge elect.

3. Still more striking is the contrast in point of character. A difference of character we expect when ages are so different. But here the difference of inferiority is on the wrong side. It is the young who is counselling, supporting, admonishing the old. It is not the ivy clinging for its own sake to the immovable wall, to be held up: but it is the

badly built, mouldering wall held together by the ivy, and only by the ivy kept from falling piecemeal into ruin.

4. Once more, we have here the contrast between a judge by office and a judge by Divine call. In the first days of the judges of Israel we find them raised up separately by God, one by one, one for each emergency. So that if war threatened the coasts of Israel, no man knew whence the help would come, or who would be Israel's deliverer. It always did come: there was always one, qualified by God, found ready for the day of need, equal to the need; one whose fitness to be a leader no one had before suspected. But when he did appear, he proved himself to be Israel's acknowledged greatest—greatest by the qualities he displayed, qualities given unto him by God. Therefore men rightly said he was a judge raised up by God. But it seems that in later days judges were appointed by hereditary succession. When danger was always near, men became afraid of trusting to God to raise up a defender for them, and making no preparations for danger of invasion; therefore, in the absence of any special qualification marking out the man, the judge's son became judge at his father's death; or the office devolved on the high priest. This was Eli's qualification, it would seem. Eli was high priest, and therefore he was judge. He appears not to have had a single ruling quality. He was only a judge because he was born to the dignity.

There is an earthly wisdom in such an arrangement—nay, such an arrangement is indispensable. It is wise after an earthly sort to have an appointed succession. Hereditary judges, hereditary nobles, hereditary sovereigns: without them, human life would run into inextricable confusion. Nevertheless, such earthly arrangements only *represent* the heavenly order. The Divine order of government is the rule of the Wise and Good. The earthly arbitrary arrangement—hereditary succession, or any other—stands for this, representing it, more or less fulfils it, but never is it perfectly. And from time to time God sets aside and quashes the arbitrary arrangement, in order to declare

that it is only a representation of the true and Divine one. From time to time, one who has qualifications direct from God is made, in Scripture, to stand side by side with one who has his qualifications only from office or earthly appointment; and then the contrast is marvellous indeed. Thus Saul, the king appointed by universal suffrage of the nation, is set aside for David, the man after God's own heart: and thus the Jews, the world's hereditary nobles, descended from the blood and stock of Abraham, are set aside for the true spiritual succession, the Christian Church—inheritors by Divine right, not of Abraham's blood, but of Abraham's faith. Thus the hereditary high priests in the genuine line of Aaron, priests by lawful succession, representing priestly powers, are set aside at once, so soon as the real High Priest of God, Jesus Christ, whose priestly powers are real and personal appears on earth. °

And thus, by the side of Eli, the judge by office, stands Samuel, the judge by Divine call: qualified by wisdom, insight, will, resting on obedience, to guide and judge God's people Israel. Very instructive are the contrasts of this chapter:—We will consider:

- I. Eli's character.
- II. Eli's doom.

Eli's character has two sides; we will take the bright side first.

The first point remarkable in him is the absence of envy. Eli furthers Samuel's advancement, and assists it to his own detriment. Very mortifying was that trial. Eli was the one in Israel to whom, naturally, a revelation should have come. God's priest and God's judge, to whom so fitly as to him could God send a message? But another is preferred: the inspiration comes to Samuel, and Eli is superseded and disgraced. Besides this, every conceivable circumstance of bitterness is added to his humiliation.—God's message for all Israel comes to a boy: to one who had been Eli's pupil, to one beneath him, who had per-

formed for him servile offices. This was the bitter cup put into his hand to drink.

And yet Eli *assists* him to attain this dignity. He perceives that God has called the child. He does not say in petulance—"Then, let this favoured child find out for himself all he has to do, I will leave him to himself." Eli meekly tells him to go back to his place, instructs him how he is to accept the revelation, and appropriate it: "Go, lie down: and it shall be, if He call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, Lord; for Thy servant heareth." He conducts his rival to the presence chamber, which by himself he cannot find, and leaves him there with the King, to be invested with the order which has been stripped off himself.

Consider how difficult this conduct of Eli's was. Remember how difficult it is to be surpassed by a younger brother, and bear it with temper; how hard it is even to be set right, with meekness; to have our faults pointed out to us: especially by persons who in rank, age, or standing, are our inferiors. Recollect how in our experience of life, in all professions, merit is kept down, shaded by jealousies. Recollect how rare generous enthusiasm is, or even fairness; how men depreciate their rivals by coldness, or by sneering at those whom they dare not openly attack.

It is hard to give information which we have collected with pains, but which we cannot use, to another who can make use of it. Consider, again, how much of our English reserve is but another name for jealousy. Men often meet in society with a consciousness of rivalry; and conversation flags because they fear to impart information, lest others should make use of it, and they should thus lose the credit of being original.

One soldier we have heard of who gave up the post of honour and the chance of high distinction to cover an early failure of that great warrior whom England has lately lost, and to give him a fresh chance of retrieving honour. He did what Eli did: assisted his rival to rise above him. But where is the man of trade who will throw in a rival's way the custom which he cannot use himself? Where is the profes-

sional man, secular or clerical, who will so speak of another of the same profession, while struggling with him in honourable rivalry, or so assist him, as to ensure that the brightest lustre shall shine upon what he really is? Whoever will ponder these things will feel that Eli's was no common act.

Now, for almost all of us, there are one or two persons in life who cross our path, whose rise will be our eclipse, whose success will abridge ours, whose fair career will thwart ours, darken our prospects, cross our affections. Those one or two form our trial; they are the test and proof of our justice. How we feel and act to them proves whether we are just or not. It was easy for Eli to have instructed any one else how to approach God. But the difficulty was how to instruct Samuel. Samuel alone in all Israel crossed his path. And yet Eli stood the test. He was unswervingly just. He threw no petty hindrances in his way. He removed all. He gave a clear, fair, honourable field. It is fair and beautiful to gaze upon, that act of Eli's.

2. Remark the absence of all priestly pretensions.

Eli might with ease have assumed the priestly tone. When Samuel came with his strange story, that he had heard a voice calling to him in the dark, Eli might have fixed upon him a clear, cold, unsympathizing eye, and said, "This is excitement—mere enthusiasm. I am the appointed channel of God's communications; I am the priest. Hear the Church. Unordained, unanointed with priestly oil, a boy, a child, it is presumption for you to pretend to communications from Jehovah! A layman has no right to hear Voices; it is fanaticism." Eli might have done this; he would have only done what ordained men have done a thousand times when they have frowned irregular enthusiasm into dissent. And then Samuel would have become a mystic, or a self-relying enthusiast. For he could not have been made to think that the Voice was a delusion. *That* Voice no priest's frown could prevent his hearing. On the other hand, Eli might have given his own authoritative interpretation to Samuel, of that word of God which he had heard. But suppose that interpretation had been wrong?

Eli did neither of these things. He sent Samuel to God. He taught him to inquire for himself. He did not tell him to reject as fanaticism the belief that an inner Voice was speaking to him, a boy; nor did he try to force his own interpretation on that Voice. His great care was to put Samuel in direct communication with God; to make him listen to God; nay, and that independently of him, Eli. Not to rule him; not to *direct* his feelings and belief; not to keep him in the leading-strings of spiritual childhood, but to teach him to walk alone.

There are two sorts of men who exercise influence. The first are those who perpetuate their own opinions, bequeath their own names, form a sect, gather a party round them who speak their words, believe their belief. Such men were the ancient Rabbis. And of such men, in and out of the Church, we have abundance now. It is the influence most aimed at and most loved. The second class is composed of those who stir up faith, conscience, thought, to do their own work. They are not anxious that those they teach should think as they do, but that they should *think*. Nor that they should take this or that rule of right and wrong, but that they should be conscientious. Nor that they should adopt their own views of God, but that faith in God should be roused in earnest. Such men propagate not many *views*; but they propagate Life itself in inquiring minds and earnest hearts.

Now this is God's real best work. Men do not think so. They like to be guided. They ask, what am I to think? and what am I to believe? and what am I to feel? Make it easy for me. Save me the trouble of reflecting and the anguish of inquiring. It is very easy to do this for them; but from what minds, and from what books, do we really gain most of that which we can really call our own? From those that are suggestive, from those that can kindle life within us, and set us thinking, and call conscience into action—not from those that exhaust a subject and seem to leave it threadbare, but from those that make us feel there is a vast deal more in that subject yet, and send us, as Eli sent Samuel, into the dark Infinite to listen for ourselves.

And this is the Ministry and its work—not to drill hearts, and minds, and consciences, into right forms of thought and mental postures, but to guide to the Living God who speaks. It is a thankless work ; for as I have said, men love to have all their religion done out for them. They want something definite, and sharp, and clear—words—not the life of God in the soul : and, indeed, it is far more flattering to our vanity to have men take our views, represent us, be led by us. Rule is dear to all. To rule men's spirits is the dearest rule of all ; but it is the work of every *true* priest of God to lead men to think and feel for themselves—to open their ears that God may speak. Eli did this part of his work in a true spirit. He guided Samuel, trained his character. But "God's spirit !" Eli says, "I cannot give that. God's voice ! I am not God's voice. I am only God's witness, erring, listening for myself. I am here, God's witness, to say—God speaks. I may err—let God be true. Let me be a liar if you will. My mission is done when your ear is opened for God to whisper into." Very true, Eli was superseded. Very true, his work was done. A new set of views, not his, respecting Israel's policy and national life, were to be propagated by his successor ; but it was Eli that had guided that successor to God who gave the views : and Eli had not lived in vain. My brethren, if any man or any body of men stand between us and the living God, saying, "Only through us—the Church—can you approach God ; only through my consecrated touch can you receive grace ; only through my ordained teaching can you hear God's voice ; and the voice which speaks in your soul in the still moments of existence is no revelation from God, but a delusion and a fanaticism"—that man is a false priest. To bring the soul face to face with God, and supersede ourselves, that is the work of the Christian ministry.

3. There was in Eli a resolve to know the whole truth. "What is the thing that the Lord hath said unto thee ? I pray thee hide it not from me : God do so to thee, and more also, if thou hide any thing from me of all the things that He said unto thee." Eli asked in earnest to know the worst.

It would be a blessed thing to know what God thinks of us. But next best to this would be to see ourselves in the light in which we appear to others: other men's opinion is a mirror in which we learn to see ourselves. It keeps us humble when bad and good alike are known to us. The worst slander has in it some truth from which we may learn a lesson, which may make us wiser when the first smart is passed.

Therefore it is a blessing to have a friend like Samuel, who can dare to tell us truth, judicious, candid, wise; one to whom we can say, "Now tell me what I am, and what I seem; hide nothing, but tell me the worst." But, observe, we are not to beg praise or invite censure—that were weak. We are not to ask for every malicious criticism or tormenting report—that were hypochondria, ever suspecting, and ever self-tormenting; and to that diseased sensibility it would be no man's duty to minister. True friendship will not retail tormenting trifles; but what we want is one friend at least, who will extenuate nothing, but with discretion tell the worst, using unflinchingly the sharp knife which is to cut away the fault.

4. There was pious acquiescence in the declared Will of God. When Samuel had told him every whit, Eli replied, "It is the Lord." The highest religion could say no more. What more can there be than surrender to the Will of God? In that one brave sentence you forget all Eli's vacillation. Free from envy, free from priestcraft, earnest, humbly submissive—that is the bright side of Eli's character, and the side least known or thought of.

There is another side to Eli's character. He was a wavering, feeble, powerless man, with excellent intentions, but an utter want of will; and if we look at it deeply, it is *will* that makes the difference between man and man; not knowledge, not opinions, not devoutness, not feeling, but will—the power to be. Let us look at the causes of this feebleness.

There are apparently two. 1. A recluse life—he lived in the temple. Praying and sacrificing, perhaps, were the

substance of his life; all that unfitted him for the world; he knew nothing of life; he knew nothing of character. When Hannah came before him in an agony of prayer, he misjudged her. He mistook the tremulousness of her lip for the trembling of intoxication. He could not rule his own household; he could not rule the Church of God—a shy, solitary, amiable ecclesiastic and recluse—that was Eli.

And such are the really fatal men in the work of life, those who look out on human life from a cloister, or who know nothing of men except through books. Religious persons dread worldliness. They will not mix in politics. They keep aloof from life. Doubtless there is a danger in knowing too much of the world. But, beyond all comparison, of the two extremes the worst is knowing too little of life. A priesthood severed from human sympathies, separated from men, cut off from human affections, and then meddling fatally with questions of human life—that is the Romish priesthood. And just as fatal when they come to meddle with public questions in the interference of men as good as Eli, as devout, and as incompetent, who have spent existence in a narrow religious party which they mistake for the World.

2. That feebleness arose out of original temperament. Eli's feelings were all good: his acts were all wrong. In sentiment Eli might be always trusted: in action he was for ever false, because he was a weak, vacillating man.

Therefore his virtues were all of a negative character. He was forgiving to his sons, because unable to feel strongly the viciousness of sin; free from jealousy, because he had no keen affections; submissive, because too indolent to feel rebellious. Before we praise a man for his excellences, we must be quite sure that they do not rise out of so many defects. No thanks to a proud man that he is not vain. No credit to a man without love that he is not jealous: he has not strength enough for passion.

All history overrates such men. Men like Eli ruin families by instability, produce revolutions, die well when

only passive courage is wanted, and are reckoned martyrs. They live like children and die like heroes. Deeply true to nature, brethren, and exceedingly instructive, is this history of Eli. It is quite natural that such men should suffer well. For if only their minds are made up for them by inevitable circumstances, they can submit. When people come to Eli and say, "You should reprove your sons," he can do it after a fashion ; when it is said to him, "You must die," he can make up his mind to die : but this is not *taking up* the cross. Let us look at the result of such a character.

1. It had no influence. Eli was despised by his own sons. He was not respected by the nation. One only of all he lived with, kept cleaving to him till the last—Samuel ; but that was in a kind of mournful pity. The secret of influence is will—not goodness ; not badness—both bad and good may have it. But will. And you cannot counterfeit will if you have it not. Men speak strongly and vehemently when most conscious of their own vacillation. They commit themselves to hasty resolutions, but the resolve is not kept ; and so, with strong feelings and good feelings, they lose influence day by day.

2. It manifested incorrigibility. Eli was twice warned ; once by a prophet, once by Samuel. Both times he answered submissively. He used strong, nay, passionate expressions of penitence. Both times you would have thought an entire reformation and change of life was at hand. Both times he was warned in vain.

There are persons who go through life sinning and sorrowing—sorrowing and sinning. No experience teaches them. Torrents of tears flow from their eyes. They are full of eloquent regrets. You cannot find it in your heart to condemn them, for their sorrow is so graceful and touching, so full of penitence and self-condemnation. But tears, heart-breaks, repentance, warnings, are all in vain. Where they did wrong once, they do wrong again. What are such persons to be in the next life ? Where will the Elis of this world be ? God only knows. But Christ has

The First King in Israel 87

said, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven."

3. It resulted in misery to others.

Recollect what this weakness caused. Those young men, Eli's sons, grew up to be their country's plague. They sapped the moral standard of their countrymen and countrywomen. They degraded the ministry. "Men abhorred the offering of the Lord." The armies of Israel, without faith in God, and without leadership of man, fled before the enemy. All that was Eli's doing. A weak man with good feelings makes more misery than a determined bad man. Under a tyranny men are at least at rest, for they know the worst. But when subjects or children know that by entreaty, or persistence, or intimidation, they can obtain what they want, then a family or a nation is cursed with restlessness. Better to live under bad laws which are firmly administered, than under good ones where there is a misgiving whether they may not be changed. There is no wretchedness like the wretchedness caused by an undetermined will to those who serve under it.

THE APPOINTMENT OF THE FIRST KING IN ISRAEL

I SAMUEL xii. 1.—"And Samuel said unto all Israel, Behold, I have hearkened unto your voice in all that ye said unto me, and have made a king over you."

OUR subject to-day is the selection of the first King of Israel.

We have arrived at that crisis in Israel's history when the first shock occurred in her national life. That shock was bereft of part of its violence by the wisdom of a single man. By the lustre of his personal character, by his institutions, and by his timely concessions, Samuel won that highest of all privileges which can be given to a mortal—the power of saving his country. He did not achieve the best con-

ceivable ; but he secured the best possible. The conceivable best was, that there should have been no shock at all, that Israel's elders should have calmly insisted on a reformation of abuses : that they should have come to Samuel, and demanded reparation for the insulted majesty of Hebrew law in the persons of the young judges, his sons, who had dared to dishonour it. This would have been the first best. The second best was the best practicable—that the shock should be made as light as possible ; that Samuel should still control the destinies of his country, select the new king, and modify the turbulence of excess. So that Israel was in the position of a boat which has been borne down a swift stream into the very suction of the rapids. The best would be that she should be put back ; but if it be too late for this, then the best is that there should be in her a strong arm and a steady eye to keep her head straight. And thus it was with Israel. She plunged down the fall madly, rashly, wickedly ; but under Samuel's control, steadily. This part of the chapter we arrange in two branches :—

I. Samuel's conduct after the mortification of his own rejection.

II. The selection of the first monarch of Israel.

I. The tenth chapter broke off in a moment of suspense. The people having accepted Saul as their king, had been dismissed, and Samuel was left alone, but his feelings were very different from those which he had in that other moment of solitude, when he had dismissed the delegates of the people. That struggle was past. He was now calm. The first moment was a terrible one. It was one of those periods in human life when the whole meaning of life is perplexed, its aims and hopes frustrated ; when a man is down upon his face and gust after gust sweeps desolately over his spirit. Samuel was there to feel all the ideas that naturally suggest themselves in such hours—the instability of human affection—the nothingness of the highest earthly aims. But by degrees, two thoughts calmed him. The first was the

feeling of identification with God's cause. "They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected Me." Had it been mere wounded pride, or pique, or family aggrandisement arrested, or ambition disappointed, it would have been a cureless sorrow. But Samuel had God's cause at heart, and this gave a loftier character to his sadness. There was no envenomed feeling, no resentment, no smarting scornfulness. To be part of a great Divine Cause which has failed, is an elevating as well as a saddening sensation. A conviction mingles with it that the cause of God will one day be the conquering side.

The other element of consolation was the Divine sympathy. If they had been rebellious to their ruler, they had also been disloyal to Jehovah. An unruly subject has had a poor school in which to learn reverence for things heavenly. Atheism and revolution here, as elsewhere, went hand-in-hand. We do not know how this sentence was impressed by the Infinite Mind on Samuel's mind; all we know is, he had a conviction that God was a fellow sufferer. This, however, was inferior in point of clearness, to *our* knowledge of the Divine sympathy: Jehovah, the unnameable and awful, was a very different conception from "God manifested in the flesh." To the Jew, His dwelling was the peak round which the cloud had wreathed its solemn form, and the thunders spent themselves; but the glory of the Life of Jesus to us is, that it is full of the Human. The many-coloured phases of human feeling all find themselves reflected in the lights and shadows of ever-varying sensitiveness which the different sentences of His conversation exhibit. Be your tone of feeling what it may, whether you are poor or rich, gay or sad—in society or alone—adored, loved, betrayed, misunderstood, despised—weigh well His words first, by thinking what they mean, and you will become aware that one heart in space throbs in conscious harmony with yours. In its degree, that was Samuel's support.

Next, Samuel's cheerful way of submitting to his fate is to be observed. Another prophet, when his prediction was nullified, built himself a booth and sat beneath it, fretting in

sullen pride, to see the end of Nineveh. Samuel might have done this ; he might have withdrawn himself in offended dignity from public life, watched the impotent attempts of the people to guide themselves, and seen dynasty after dynasty fall with secret pleasure. Very different is his conduct. He addresses himself like a man to the exigencies of the moment. His great scheme is frustrated. Well, he will not despair of God's cause yet. Bad as things are, he will try to make the best of them.

Now remark in all this, the healthy, vigorous tone of Samuel's religion. This man, the greatest and wisest then alive, thought this the great thing to live for—to establish a kingdom of God on earth—to transform his own country into a kingdom of God. It is worth while to see how he set about it. From first to last, it was in a practical, real way—by activity in every department of life. We recollect his early childhood, his duty then was to open the gates of the temple of the Lord, and he did that regularly, with scrupulous fidelity, in the midst of very exciting scenes. He was turning that narrow circumscribed sphere of his into a kingdom of God. Afterwards he became ruler. His spirituality then consisted in establishing courts of justice, founding academies, looking into everything himself. Now he is deposed : but he has duties still. He has a king to look for, public festivals to superintend, a public feast to preside over ; and later on we shall find him becoming the teacher of a school. All this was a religion for life. His spirituality was no fanciful, shadowy thing ; the kingdom of God to him was to be in this world, and we know no surer sign of enfeebled religion than the disposition to separate religion from life and life-duties. Listen : what is secularity or worldliness ? Meddling with worldly things ? or meddling with a worldly spirit ? We brand political existence and thought with the name “worldly”—we stigmatize first one department of life and then another as secular ; and so religion becomes a pale, unreal thing, which must end, if we are only true to our principles, in the cloister. Spirituality becomes the exclusive property of a few amiable mystics ;

men of thought and men of action draw off; religion becomes feeble, and the world, deserted and proscribed, becomes infidel.

II. Samuel's treatment of his successor, after his own rejection, is remarkable. It was characterized by two things—courtesy and generosity. When he saw the man who was to be his successor, he invited him to the entertainment; he gave him precedence, bidding him go up before him; placed him as a stranger at the post of honour, and set before him the choice portion. This is politeness; what we allude to is a very different thing, however, from that mere system of etiquette and conventionalisms in which small minds find their very being, to observe which accurately is life, and to transgress which is a sin. Courtesy is not confined to the high-bred; often theirs is but the artistic imitation of courtesy. The peasant who rises to put before you his only chair, while he sits upon the oaken chest, is a polite man. Motive determines everything. If we are courteous merely to substantiate our claims to mix in good society, or exhibit good manners chiefly to show that we have been in it, this is a thing indeed to smile at; contemptible, if it were not rather pitiable. But that politeness which springs spontaneously from the heart, the desire to put others at their ease, to save the stranger from a sensation of awkwardness, to soothe the feeling of inferiority—that, ennobled as it is by love, mounts to the high character of a heavenly grace.

Something still more beautiful marks Samuel's generosity. The man who stood before him was a successful rival. One who had been his inferior now was to supersede him. And Samuel lends him a helping hand—gracefully assists him to rise above him, entertains him, recommends him to the people. It is very touching.

Curiously enough, Samuel had twice in life to do a similar thing. Once he had to depose Eli, by telling him God's doom. Now he has to depose himself. The first he shrank from, and only did it at last when urged. That was

delicate. On the present occasion, with a large and liberal fulness of heart, he elevates Saul above himself. And that we call the true, high Gospel spirit. Samuel and the people did the same thing—they made Saul king. But the people did it by drawing down Samuel nearer to themselves. Samuel did it by elevating Saul above himself. One was the spirit of revolution, the other was the spirit of the Gospel.

In our own day, it specially behoves us to try the spirits, whether they be of God. The reality and the counterfeit, as in this case, are singularly like each other. Three spirits make their voices heard, in a cry for Freedom, for Brotherhood, for human Equality. And we must not forget, these are names hallowed by the very Gospel itself. They are inscribed on its forehead. Unless we realize them, we have no Gospel kingdom. Distinguish, however, well the reality from the baser alloy. The spirit which longs for freedom puts forth a righteous claim; for it is written, "If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." Brotherhood—the Gospel promises brotherhood also—"One is your master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren." Equality—Yes. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond, nor free." This is the grand Federation, Brotherhood, Emancipation of the human race.

Now the world's spirit aims at bringing all this about by drawing others down to the level on which each one stands. The Christian spirit secures equality by raising up. The man that is less wise, less good than I, I am to raise up to my level in these things. Yes, and in social position too, if he be fit for it. I am to be glad to see him rise above me, as generously as Samuel saw Saul. And those that are above me, better than I, wiser than I, I have a right to expect to elevate me, if they can, to be as wise and good as themselves. This is the only levelling the Gospel knows. What was the mission of the Redeemer but this? To raise the lower to the higher, to make men partakers of the Divine Nature—His Nature, standing on His ground; to

descend to the roots of society, reclaiming the outcasts, elevating the degraded, enabling the low, and reminding, in the thunder of reiterated "Woes," those who had left their inferiors in the dark, and those who stood aloof in the titled superiority of Rabbi—of the account to be rendered by them yet.

And if we could but all work in this generous rivalry, our rent and bleeding country, sick at heart, gangrened with an exclusiveness, which narrows our sympathies and corrupts our hearts, might be all that the most patriotic love would have her. Brethren in Christ, I earnestly urge again the lesson of last Sunday. Not by pulling down those that are above us, not by the still more un-Christlike plan of keeping down those that are beneath us, can we make this country of ours a kingdom of Christ. If we cannot practise, nor bear to have impressed upon us, more condescension, more tenderness, and the duty of unlearning much, very much of that galling, insulting spirit of demarcation with which we sever ourselves from the sympathies of the class immediately beneath us, those tears may have to flow again which were shed over the City which would not know the day of her visitation: lulled into an insane security even at the moment when the judgment eagles were gathered together, and plunging for their prey.

Once more there is suggested to us the thought that Samuel was now growing old. It seems, by the eleventh and thirteenth chapters, in connection with the text, that the cause which hastened the demand of the elders for a king was the danger of invasion. The Ammonites and Philistines were sharpening their swords for war. And men felt that Samuel was too old for such a crisis. Only a few Sundays ago we were considering Samuel's childhood, his weaning, education, and call. Now he is old: his hair is grey, and men beginning to feel that he is no longer what he was. A high, great life; and a few chapters sum it all up. And such is all life.

To-day we baptize a child; in a period of time startlingly short, the minister is called upon to prepare the young

man for confirmation. A little interval, and the chimes are ringing a merry wedding peal. One more pause, and the winds are blowing their waves of shadow over the long grass that grows rankly on his grave. The font, the altar, and the sepulchre, and but a single step between. Now, we do not dwell on this. It is familiar—a tale that is told.

But what we mention this for is, to observe that though Samuel's life was fast going, Samuel's work was permanent. Evidence of this lies in the chapter before us. When Saul came to the city and inquired for the Seer's house, some young maidens, on their way to draw water, replied; and their reply contained an accurate account, even to details, of the religious service which was about to take place. The judge had arrived; there was to be a sacrifice, the people would not eat till he came, he would pronounce a blessing, after that there would be a select feast. Now, compare the state of things in Israel when Samuel became judge. Had a man come to a city in Israel then, there would have been no sacrifice going on, or if there had, no one would have been found so accurately familiar with the whole service; for then "men abhorred the offering of the Lord." But now, the first chance passer-by could run through it all, as a thing habitual—as a Church of England worshipper would tell you the hours of service, and the order of its performance. So that they might forget Samuel—they might crowd round his successor—but Samuel's work could not be forgotten: years after he was quiet and silent under ground, his courts in Bethel and Mizpeh would form the precedents and the germs of the national jurisprudence.

A very pregnant lesson. Life passes, work is permanent. It is all going—fleeting and withering. Youth goes. Mind decays. That which is done remains. Through ages, through eternity, what you have done for God, that, and only that, you are. Ye that are workers, and count it the soul's worst disgrace to feel life passing in idleness and uselessness, take courage. Deeds never die. .

NOTES ON PSALM LI

Written by David, after a double crime :—Uriah put in the fore-front of the battle—the wife of the murdered man taken, &c.

A DARKER guilt you will scarcely find—kingly power abused—worst passions yielded to. Yet this psalm breathes from a spirit touched with the finest sensibilities of spiritual feeling.

Two sides of our mysterious twofold being here. Something in us near to hell: something strangely near to God. "Half beast—half devil?" No: rather half diabolical—half divine: half demon—half God. This man mixing with the world's sins in such sort that we shudder. But he draws near the Majesty of God, and becomes softened, purified, melted.

It is good to observe this, that we rightly estimate: generously of fallen humanity; moderately of highest saintship.

In our best estate and in our purest moments there is a something of the Devil in us which, if it could be known, would make men shrink from us. The germs of the worst crimes are in us all. In our deepest degradation there remains something sacred, undefiled, the pledge and gift of our better nature: a germ of indestructible life, like the grains of wheat among the cerements of a mummy, surviving through three thousand years; which *may* be planted, and live, and grow again.

It is this truth of human feeling which makes the Psalms, more than any other portion of the Old Testament, the link of union between distant ages. The historical books need a rich store of knowledge before they can be a modern book of life; but the Psalms are the records of individual experience. Personal religion is the same in all ages. The deeps of our humanity remain unruffled by the storms

of ages which change the surface. This psalm, written three thousand years ago, might have been written yesterday: describes the vicissitudes of spiritual life in an Englishman as truly as of a Jew. "Not of an age but for all time."

I. Scripture estimate of sin.

II. Spiritual restoration.

I. Scripture estimate of sin.

1. Personal accountability. "My sin"—strange, but true. It is hard to believe the sin we do our own. One lays the blame on circumstances: another on those who tempted; a third on Adam, Satan, or his own nature, as if it were not himself. "The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge."

In this psalm, no such self-exculpation. Personal accountability throughout. No source of evil suggested or conceived but his own guilty will: no shifting of responsibility: no pleading of a passionate nature, or of royal exposure as peculiar. "I have sinned." "I acknowledge my transgression: my sin is ever before me."

One passage only seems at first to breathe a different tone, "In sin did my mother conceive me." By some interpreted as referring to hereditary sin: alleged as a proof of the doctrine of transmitted guilt, as if David traced the cause of his act to his maternal character.

True as the doctrine is that physical and moral qualities are transmissible, you do not find that doctrine here. It is not in excuse but in exaggeration of his fault that David speaks. He lays on himself the blame of a tainted nature, instead of that of a single fault: not a murder only, but of a murderous nature. "Conceived in sin." From his first moments up till then, he saw sin—sin—sin: nothing but sin.

Learn—the individual character of sin—its personal origin, and personal identity. There can be no transference of it. It is individual and incommunicable. My sin cannot be your sin, nor yours mine.

Conscience, when it is healthy, ever speaks thus: "my transgression." It was not the guilt of them that tempted you: they have theirs; but each as a separate agent, his own degree of guilt. Yours is your own: the violation of your own and not another's sense of duty; solitary, awful, unshared, adhering to you alone of all the spirits of the universe.

Perilous to refer the evil in us to any source out of and beyond ourselves. In this way penitence becomes impossible: fictitious.

2. Estimated as hateful to God. "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight; that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest." The simple judgment of the conscience. But another estimate, born of the intellect, comes in collision with this religion and bewilders it. Look over life, and you will find it hard to believe that sin is *against* God: that it is not rather *for* Him.

Undeniable, that out of evil comes good: that evil is the resistance in battle, with which good is created and becomes possible. Physical evil, *e.g.* Hunger, an evil, is the parent of industry, human works, all that man has done: beautifies life. The storm fire burns up the forest, and slays man and beast; but purifies the air of contagion. Lately, the tragic death of eleven fishermen elicited the sympathy and charities of thousands.

Even moral evil is also generative of good. Peter's cowardice enabled him to be a comforter: "when he was converted, to strengthen his brethren." David's crime was a vantage ground, from which he rose through penitence nearer to God. Through it this psalm has blessed ages. But if the sin had not been done!

Now, contemplating this, we begin to perceive that evil is God's instrument. "If evil be in the city the Lord hath done it." Then the contemplative intellectualist looks over this scene of things, and complacently approves of evil as God's contrivance, as much as good is: a temporary necessity, worthy of His wisdom to create. And then,

can He truly hate that which He has made? Can His agent be His enemy? Is it not shortsightedness to be angry with it? Not the antagonist of God surely, but His creature and faithful servant this evil. Sin cannot be "against God."

Thus arises a horrible contradiction between the instincts of the conscience and the judgment of the understanding. Judas must have been, says the intellect, God's agent as much as Paul. "Why doth He yet find fault? for who had resisted His will? Do not evil men perform His will? Why should I blame sin in another or myself, seeing it is necessary? Why not say at once, Crime and Virtue are the same?"

Thoughts such as these, at some time or another, I doubt not, haunt and perplex us all. Conscience is overborne by the intellect. Some time during every life the impossibility of reconciling these two verdicts is felt, and the perplexity confuses action. Men sin with a secret per-adventure behind. "Perhaps evil is not so bad after all—perhaps good—who knows?"

Remember therefore, in matters practical, conscience not intellect is our guide. Unsophisticated conscience ever speaks this language of the Bible.

We cannot help believing that our sentiments towards Right and Wrong are a reflection of God's. That we call just and true, we cannot but think is just and true in His sight. That which seems base and vile to us, we are compelled to think is so to Him: and this in proportion as we act up to duty. In that proportion we feel that His sentiments coincide with ours.

In such moments, when the God within us speaks most peremptorily and distinctly, we feel that the language of this psalm is true: and that no other language expresses the truth. Sin is not *for* God—cannot be: but "against God." An opposition to His will, a contradiction to His nature: not a coincidence with it. He abhors it—will banish it, and annihilate it.

In these days, when French sentimentalism, theological

dreams, and political speculations, are unsettling the old landmarks with fearful rapidity, if we do not hold fast, and that simply and firmly, that first principle, that right is right, and wrong wrong, all our moral judgments will become confused, and the penitence of the noblest hearts an absurdity. For what can be more absurd than knowingly to reproach ourselves for that which God intended?

3. Sin estimated as separation from God. Two views of sin: The first reckoning it evil, because consequences of pain are annexed: the second, evil, because a contradiction of our own nature and God's will.

In this psalm the first is ignored: the second, implied throughout. "Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me." "Have mercy upon me," does not mean, Save me from torture. You cannot read the psalm and think so. It is not the trembling of a craven spirit in anticipation of torture, but the agonies of a noble one in the horror of *being* evil.

If the first view were true, then, if God were by an act of will to reverse the consequences, and annex pain to goodness and joy to crime, to lie and injure would become Duty as much as before they were sins. But penalties do not change good into evil. Good is for ever good; evil for ever evil. God Himself could not alter that by a command. Eternal hell could not make truth wrong: nor everlasting pleasure ennoble sensuality.

Do you fancy that men like David, shuddering in sight of evil, dreaded a material hell? I venture to say, into true penitence the idea of punishment never enters. If it did it would be almost a relief: but, oh! those moments in which a selfish act has appeared more hideous than any pain which the fancy of a Dante could devise! when the idea of the strife of self-will in battle with the loving will of God prolonged for ever, has painted itself to the imagination as the real Infinite Hell! when self-concentration and the extinction of love in the soul has been felt as the real damnation of the Devil-nature!

And recollect how sparingly Christianity appeals to the prudential motives. Use them it does, because they are

motives, but rarely. Retribution is a truth : and Christianity, true to nature, warns of retribution. But, except to rouse men sunk in forgetfulness, or faltering with truth, it almost never appeals to it : and never with the hope of eliciting from such motives as the hope of heaven or the fear of hell, high goodness.

To do good for reward, the Son of Man declares to be the sinner's religion. "If ye lend to them who lend to you, what thank have ye?" and He distinctly proclaims that alone to be spiritually good, "the righteousness of God," which "does good, hoping for nothing in return;" adding, as the only motive, "that ye may be the children of (*i.e.*, resemble) your Father which is in Heaven: for He maketh His sun to shine on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."

II. Restoration.

First step—Sacrifice of a broken spirit.

Observe the accurate and even Christian perception of the real meaning of sacrifice by the ancient spiritually-minded Jews.

Sacrifice has its origin in two feelings; one human; one divine or inspired.

True feeling: something to be given to God: surrendered: that God must be worshipped with our best.

Human: added to this—mixed up with it, is the fancy that this sacrifice pleases God because of the loss or pain which it inflicts. Then men attribute to God their own revengeful feelings: think that the philosophy of sacrifice consists in the necessity of punishing: call it justice to let the blow fall somewhere—no matter where: blood must flow. Hence heathen sacrifices were offered to *appease* the Deity, to buy off His wrath—the purer the offering the better:—Iphigenai to glut His fury. Instances illustrating the feeling: Zaleucus—two eyes given to the law: barbarian rude notions of justness mixed up with a father's instincts. Polycrates and Amasis: seal sacrificed to avert the anger of heaven—supposed to be jealous of mortal prosperity. These

notions were mixed up with Judaism : nay, are mixed up now with Christian conceptions of Christ's sacrifice.

Jewish sacrifices therefore presented two thoughts—to the spiritual, true notions ; to the unspiritual, false : and expressed these feelings for each. But men like David felt that what lay beneath all sacrifice as its ground and meaning, was surrender to God's will : that a man's best is himself : and to sacrifice this is the true sacrifice. By degrees they came to see that the sacrifice was but a form—typical : and that it might be superseded.

Compare this psalm with Psalm L.

They were taught this chiefly through sin and suffering. Conscience, truly wounded, could not be appeased by these sacrifices which were offered year by year continually. The selfish coward, who saw in sin nothing terrible but the penalty, could be satisfied of course. Believing that the animal bore his punishment, he had nothing more to dread. But they who felt sin to be estrangement from God, who were not thinking of punishment ; what relief could be given to them by being told that the *penalty* of their sins was borne by another being ? They felt that only by surrender to God could conscience be at rest.

Learn then—God does not wish pain, but goodness : Not suffering, but you—yourself—your heart.

Even in the sacrifice of Christ, God wished only this. It was precious not because it was pain : but because the pain, the blood, the death, were the last and highest evidence of entire surrender.—Satisfaction ? Yes, the blood of Christ satisfied. Why ? Because God can glut His vengeance in innocent blood more sweetly than in guilty ? Because, like the barbarian Zaleucus, so long as the whole penalty is paid, He cares not by whom ? Or was it because for the first time He saw human nature a copy of the Divine nature : the will of Man the Son perfectly coincident with the will of God the Father : the Love of Deity for the first time exhibited by man : obedience entire, “unto death, even the death of the cross ?” Was that the sacrifice which He saw in His beloved Son wherewith He was well

pleased? Was that the sacrifice of Him who, through the Eternal Spirit, offered Himself without spot to God: the sacrifice once offered which hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified?

2. Last step—Spirit of liberty. Thy free spirit—literally, princely. But the translation is right. A princely is a free spirit: unconstrained. Hence, St. James, “the royal law of liberty.”

Two classes of motives may guide to acts of seeming goodness:—1. Prudential. 2. Generous.

The agent of the Temperance Society appeals to prudential motives when he demonstrates the evils of intoxication: enlists the aid of anatomy: contrasts the domestic happiness and circumstantial comfort of the temperate home with that of the intemperate.

An appeal to the desire of happiness and fear of misery. A motive, doubtless: and of unquestionable potency. All I say is, that from this class of motives comes nothing of the highest stamp.

Prudential motives will move men: but compare the rush of population from east to west for gold, with a similar rush in the time of the crusades. A dream—a fancy; but an appeal to generous and unselfish emotions: to enthusiasm which has in it no reflex consideration of personal greed: in the one case, simply a transfer of population, with vices and habits unchanged: in the other, a sacrifice of home, country, all.

Tell men that salvation is personal happiness, and damnation personal misery, and that goodness consists in seeking the one and avoiding the other, and you will get religionists: but poor, stunted, dwarfish:—asking, with painful self-consciousness, Am I saved? Am I lost? Prudential considerations about a distant happiness, conflicting with passionate impulses to secure a near and present one: men moving in shackles—“letting I dare not wait upon I would.”

Tell men that God is Love: that Right is Right, and Wrong Wrong: let them cease to admire philanthropy, and

begin to love men : cease to pant for heaven, and begin to love God : then the spirit of liberty begins.

When fear has done its work—whose office is not to create holiness, but to arrest conscience—and self abasement has set in in earnest ; then the Free Spirit of God begins to breathe upon the soul like a gale from a healthier climate, refreshing it with a more generous and a purer love. Prudence is no longer left in painful and hopeless struggle with desire : Love bursts the shackles of the soul, and we are free.

SOLOMON'S RESTORATION

NEHEMIAH xiii. 26.—“ Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God.”

THERE is one study, my Christian brethren, which never can lose its interest for us so long as we are men :—and that is the investigation of human character. The deep interest of Biography consists in this—that it is in some measure the description to us of our own inner history. You cannot unveil the secrets of another heart without at the same time finding something to correspond with, and perchance explain, the mysteries of your own. Heart answers here to heart. Between the wisest and the worst there are ten thousand points of marvellous resemblance ; and so the trials, the frailties, the bitterness of any human soul, faithfully traced out, ever shadow out to us a portraiture of our own experience. Give but the inner heart history of the most elevated spirit that ever conquered in life's struggle, and place it before the most despicable that ever failed, and you exhibit to him so much of the picture of his own very self, that you perforce command his deepest attention. Only let the inarticulate life of the peasant find for itself a distinct voice, and a true biographer ; let the inward struggles which have agitated that rough frame be given faithfully to the

world, and there is not a monarch whose soul will not be thrilled with those inner details of an existence with which outwardly he has not a single thought in common.

It is for this reason that Solomon's life is full of painful interest. Far removed as he is, in some respects, above our sympathies, in others he peculiarly commands them. He was a monarch, and none of us know the sensations which belong to Rule. He was proclaimed by God to be among the wisest of mankind, and few of us can even conceive the atmosphere in which such a gifted spirit moves, original, inquiring, comprehending, one to whom Nature has made her secret open. He lived in the infancy of the world's society, and we live in its refined and civilized manhood. And yet, brethren, when we have turned away wearied from all those subjects in which the mind of Solomon expatiated, and try to look inwards at the *man*, straightway we find ourselves at home. Just as in our own trifling, petty history, so we find in him, Life with the same unabated, mysterious interest; the dust and the confusion of a battle, sublime longings, and low weaknesses, perplexity, struggle; and then the grave closing over all this, and leaving us to marvel in obscurity and silence over the strange destinies of man. Humbling, brethren, is all this, at the same time that it is most instructive. God's strange dealings with the human heart, when shall they cease their interest for us? When shall it be that life, with all its mysteries, will tire us to look upon? When shall it be that the fate of man shall cease to wake up emotion in man's bosom?

Now, we are to bear in mind that the career of Solomon is a problem which has perplexed many, and is by no means an easy one to solve. He belongs to the peculiar class of those who begin well, and then have the brightness of their lives obscured at last. His morning sun rose beautifully; it sank in the evening, clouded, and dark with earthy exhalations—too dark to prophesy with certainty how it should rise on the morrow. Solomon's life was not what religious existence ought to be. The Life of God in the soul of man ought to be a thing of perpetual development; it ought to

be more bright, and its pulsations more vigorous every year. Such certainly, at least to an appearance, Solomon's was not. It was excellence, at all events, marred with inconsistency. It was original uprightness disgraced by a fall, and that fall so prolonged and signal that it has always been a disputed question among commentators, whether he ever rose from it again at all. But the passage which I have selected for the text, in connection with one or two others, seems to decide this question. "Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things?" that is, marriage with foreign wives? "Yet among many nations was there no king like him who was beloved of his God." Now, there can be no doubt of the view given us in this verse. Six hundred years after Solomon had been sleeping in earthly dust, when all contemporaries were dead, and all personal feelings had passed away, when history could pronounce her calm verdict upon his existence as a whole, Nehemiah, in this passage, gave a summary of his character. He speaks to us of Solomon as a saint—a saint in whom saintliness had been wonderfully defaced—imperfect, tempted, fallen; but still ranked among those whom God's love had pre-eminently distinguished.

Now let us compare with this the prophecy which had been uttered by Nathan before Solomon was born. Thus he spoke in God's name to David of the son who was to succeed him on the throne (2 Sam. vii. 14):—"I will be his father, and he shall be My son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men,"—*i. e.* the rod as a human being uses it, for correction, not everlasting destruction—"and with the stripes of the children of men. But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul." In this we have a distinct covenant, made prophetically. God foretold Solomon's terrible apostasy; and with it He foretold Solomon's restoration. And there is one point especially remarkable. He parallels Solomon's career with Saul's. Saul began well, and Saul ended ill. Just so it was with Solomon. Here was the parallel. But, farther than this, God distinctly warned, the parallel did not go. Saul's deterioration from good was permanent. Solomon's

deterioration, dark as it was, had some point of essential difference. It was not for ever! Saul's life darkened from morning brightness into the gloom of everlasting night. Solomon's life darkened too, but the curtain of clouds was rolled aside at last, and before the night set in, the sun shone out, in serene, calm brilliancy.

We take up, therefore, for our consideration to-day the life of Solomon in these two particulars.

I. The wanderings of an erring spirit. "Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things?"

II. The guidance of that spirit, amidst all its wanderings, by God's love. "There was no king like unto him who was beloved of his God."

"Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things?" This is the first point for us to dwell on—the wanderings of a frail and erring human spirit from the right way. That which lay at the bottom of all Solomon's transgressions was his intimate partnership with foreigners. "Did not Solomon sin by these things?" that is, if we look to the context, marriage with foreign wives. The history of the text is this—Nehemiah discovered that the nobles of Judah, during the captivity, when law and religious customs had been relaxed, had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab; and then, in his passionate expostulation with them, he reminds them that it was this very transgression which led to the fall of the monarch who had been most distinguished for God's favour. In the whole Jewish system, no principle was more distinct than this—the separation of God's people from partnership with this world. Exclusiveness was the principle on which Judaism was built. The Israelites were not to mix with the nations: they were not to marry with them: they were not to join with them in religious fellowship or commercial partnership. Everything was to be distinct—as distinct as God's service and the world's. And it was this principle which Solomon transgressed. He married a princess of Egypt. He connected himself with wives from idolatrous countries—Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, Hittites. And then

Nehemiah's argument, built on the eternal truth that friendship with the world is enmity with God, is this,—“Did not Solomon sin by these things?”

That Jewish law, my brethren, shadowed out an everlasting truth. God's people are an exclusive nation; God's Church is for ever separated from the world. This is her charter, “Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.” God's people may break that charter, but they do it at their own peril. And we may be very sure of this, when a religious person begins to feel an inclination for intimate communion with the world, and begins to break down that barrier which is the line of safety, the first step is made of a series of long, dark wanderings from God. We are to be separate, brethren, from the world. Mistake not the meaning of that word. The world changes its complexion in every age. Solomon's world was the nations of idolatry lying round Israel. *Our* world is not that. The world is that collection of men in every age who live only according to the maxims of their time. The world may be a profligate world, or it may be a moral world. All that is a matter of accident. Our world is a moral world. The sons of our world are not idolators, they are not profligate, they are, it may be, among the most fascinating of mankind. Their society is more pleasing, more lively, more diversified in information than religious society. No marvel if a young and ardent heart feels the spell of the fascination. No wonder if it feels a relief in turning away from the dulness and the monotony of home life to the sparkling brilliancy of the world's society. No marvel if Solomon felt the superior charms of the accomplished Egyptian and the wealthy Tyrian. His Jewish countrymen and countrywomen were but homely in comparison. What wonder if the young monarch felt it a relaxation to emancipate himself from the thralldom of a society which had little to interest his grasping and restless mind, and to throw himself upon a companionship which

had more of refinement, and more of cultivation, and more of that enlargement of mind which his own gifted character was so fitted to enjoy?

It is no marvel, brethren. It is all most natural, all most intelligible—a temptation which we feel ourselves every day. The brilliant, dazzling, accomplished world—what Christian with a mind polished like Solomon's does not own its charms? And yet now, pause. Is it in wise Egypt that our highest blessedness lies? Is it in busy, restless Sidon? Is it in luxurious Moab? No, my Christian brethren. The Christian must leave the world alone. His blessedness lies in quiet work with the Israel of God. His home is in that deep, unruffled tranquillity which belongs to those who are trying to know Christ. And when a Christian will not learn this; when he will not understand that in calmness, and home, and work, and love his soul must find its peace, when he will try keener and more exciting pleasures; when he says, I must taste what life is while I am young, its feverishness, its strange, delirious, maddening intoxication, he has just taken Solomon's first step, and he must take the whole of Solomon's after and most bitter experience along with it.

The second step of Solomon's wandering was the unrestrained pursuit of pleasure. And a man like Solomon cannot do anything by halves. What he did, he did thoroughly. No man ever more heartily and systematically gave himself up to the pursuit. If he once made up his mind that pleasure was his aim, then for pleasure he lived. There are some men who are *prudent* in their epicureanism. They put gaiety aside when they begin to get palled with it, and then return to it moderately again. Men like Solomon cannot do that. No earnest man can. No! if blessedness lies in pleasure, he will drink the cup to the dregs. Listen to what he says,—“I sought in mine heart to give myself unto wine, yet acquainting mine heart with wisdom; and to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life.” That was a pursuit of pleasure which

was at least decided and systematic—manly. Observe, brethren, we have none of the cool, cautious sipping of enjoyment there. We have none of the feeble, languid attempts to enjoy the world which makes men venture ankle-deep in dissipation, and only long for courage to go a little further. It is the earnestness of an impassioned man, a man who has quitted God, and thrown himself, heart and soul, upon everything that he tries, and says he will try it fairly and to the full.

“Let us see what the world is worth.” Perhaps some minds amongst us now are not altogether strangers to a feeling such as this. There is many a soul, formed for higher and better things, that has, at one time or another, lost its hold on God, and felt the impulse of its own desires urging it on for ever, dissatisfied, restless, panting for a celestial fruit which seems forbidden, and half expecting to find that fruit in life's excitement. These are the wanderings of an erring spirit. But, my brethren, let us mark the wanderings of an *immortal* soul infinite in its vastness. There is a moral to be learnt from the wildest worldliness. When we look on the madness of life, and are marvelling at the terrible career of dissipation, let there be no contempt felt. It is an immortal spirit marrying itself. It is an infinite soul, which nothing short of the Infinite can satisfy, plunging down to ruin and disappointment. Men of pleasure! whose hearts are as capable of an eternal blessedness as a Christian's, that is the terrible meaning and moral of your dissipation. God in Christ is your only Eden, and out of Christ you can have nothing but the restlessness of Cain; you are blindly pursuing your destiny. That unquenched impetuosity within you might have led you up to God. You have chosen instead that your heart shall try to satisfy itself upon husks.

There was another form of Solomon's worldliness. It was not worldliness in pleasure, but worldliness in occupation. He had entered deeply into commercial speculations. He had alternate fears and hopes about the return of his merchant ships on their perilous three-years' voyage to

India and to Spain. He had his mind occupied with plans for building. The architecture of the Temple, his own palace, the forts and towns of his now magnificent empire, all this filled for a time his soul. He had begun a system of national debt and ruinous taxation. He had become a slaveholder and a despot, who was compelled to keep his people down by armed force. Much of this was not wrong ; but all of it was dangerous. It is a strange thing how business dulls the sharpness of the spiritual affections. It is strange how the harass of perpetual occupation shuts God out. It is strange how much mingling with the world, politics, and those things which belong to advancing civilization, things which are very often in the way of our duty, deaden the delicate sense of right and wrong. Let Christians be on their guard by double prayerfulness when duty makes them men of business or calls them to posts of worldly activity. Solomon did things of questionable morality which he never would have done if he had not had the ambition to distinguish himself among the princes of this world. Business and worldliness dried up the springs of his spirituality. It was the climax of Solomon's transgression that he suffered the establishment of idolatry in his dominions.

There are writers who have said that in this matter Solomon was in advance of his age—enlightened beyond the narrowness of Judaism, and that this permission of idolatry was the earliest exhibition of that spirit which in modern times we call religious toleration. But, my brethren, Solomon went far beyond toleration. It is written, when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods ; for he went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. The truth seems to be, Solomon was getting indifferent about religion. He had got into light and worldly society, and the libertinism of his associations was beginning to make its impression upon him. He was beginning to ask, Is not one religion as good as another, so long as each man believes his own in earnest? He began

to feel there is a great deal to be said for these different religions. After all, there is nothing certain; and why forbid men the quiet enjoyment of their own opinion? And so he became what men call liberal, and he took idolatry under his patronage. There are few signs in a soul's state more alarming than that of religious indifference, that is, the spirit of thinking all religions equally true,—the real meaning of which is, that all religions are equally false.

II. We are to consider, in the last place, God's loving guidance of Solomon in the midst of all his apostasy. My Christian brethren, in the darkest, wildest wanderings, a man to whom God has shown his love in Christ is conscious still of the better way. In the very gloom of his remorse, there is an instinctive turning back to God. It is enumerated among the gifts that God bestowed on Solomon, that He granted to him "largeness of heart." Now that largeness of heart which we call thoughtfulness and sensibility, generosity, high feeling, marks out, for the man who has it, a peculiar life. Life becomes an intense thing: if there be guilt, then his life will be desolating remorse; if love, then the very ecstasy of blessedness. But a cool, common-place life he cannot have. According to Scripture phraseology, Solomon had a great heart; and therefore it was that for such an one the discipline which was to lead him back to God must needs be terrible. "If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men." That was God's covenant, and with tremendous fidelity was it kept.

You look to the life of Solomon, and there are no outward reverses there to speak of. His reign was a type of the reign of the power of peace. No war, no national disaster, interrupted the even flow of the current of his days. No loss of a child, like David's, pouring cold desolation into his soul—no pestilences nor famines. Prosperity and riches, and the internal development of the nation's life, that was the reign of Solomon. And yet, brethren, with all this, was Solomon happy? Has God no arrows winged in heaven for the heart, except those which come in the shape of outward calamity? Is there no way that God has of making

the heart gray and old before its time, without sending bereavement, or loss, or sickness? Has the Eternal Justice no mode of withering and drying up the inner springs of happiness, while all is green, and wild, and fresh, outwardly? We look to the history of Solomon for the answer.

The first way in which his aberration from God treasured up for him chastisement, was by that weariness of existence which breathes through the whole book of Ecclesiastes. That book bears internal evidence of having been written after repentance and victory. It is the experience of a career of pleasure; and the tone which vibrates through the whole is disgust with the world, and mankind, and life, and self. I hold that book to be inspired. God put it into the heart of Solomon to make that experience public. But my brethren, by "inspired," I do not mean that all the feelings to which that book gives utterance are right or holy feelings. Saint John could not have written that book. John, who had lived in the atmosphere of love, looking on this world as God looks on it—calmly, with the deep peace of heaven in his soul, at peace with himself, and at peace with man—John could never have penned the book of Ecclesiastes. To have written the book of Ecclesiastes a man must have been qualified in a peculiar way. He must have been a man of intense feeling—large in heart, as the Bible calls it. He must have been a man who had drunk deep of unlawful pleasure. He must have been a man in the upper ranks of society, with plenty of leisure and plenty of time to brood on self. Therefore, in saying it is an inspired book, I mean the inspired account of the workings of a guilty, erring, and yet, at last, conquering spirit. It is not written as a wise and calm Christian would write, but, as a heart would write which was fevered with disappointment, jaded with passionate attempts in the pursuit of blessedness, and forced to God as the last resource.

My younger brethren, that saddest book in all the Bible stands before you as the beacon and the warning from a God who loves you, and would spare you bitterness if He

could. Follow inclination now, put no restraint on feeling,—say that there is time enough to be religious by-and-by—forget that now is the time to take Christ's yoke upon you, and learn gradually and peacefully that serene control of heart which must be learnt at last by a painful wrench—forget all that, and say that you trust in God's love and mercy to bring all right, and then that book of Ecclesiastes is your history. The penalty that you pay for a youth of pleasure is, if you have anything good in you, an old age of weariness and remorseful dissatisfaction.

Another part of Solomon's chastisement was doubt. Once more turn to the book of Ecclesiastes. "All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not." In this, brethren, you will observe the querulous complaint of a man who has ceased to feel that God is the Ruler of this world. A blind chance, or a dark destiny, seems to rule all earthly things. And that is the penalty of leaving God's narrow path for sin's wider and more flowery one. You lose your way; you get perplexed; doubt takes possession of your soul. And my Christian brethren, if I speak to any such, you know that there is no suffering more severe than doubt. There is a loss of aim, and you know not what you have to live for. Life has lost its meaning, and its infinite significance. There is a hollowness at the heart of your existence. There is a feeling of weakness, and a discontented loss of self-respect. God has hidden his face from you because you have been trying to do without Him or to serve Him with a divided heart.

But now, lastly, we have to remark, that the Love of God brought Solomon through all this to spiritual manhood. "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty of man." In this, brethren, we have the evidence of his victory. Doubt, and imprisonment, and worldliness, have passed away, and clear activity, belief, freedom, have taken their place. It was a terrible discipline, but God had

made that discipline successful. Solomon struggled manfully to the end. The details of his life were dark, but the life itself was earnest; and after many a fall, repentance, with unconquerable purpose, began afresh. And so he struggled on, often baffled, often down, but never finally subdued; and still with tears and indomitable trust, returning to the conflict again. And so, when we come to the end of his last earthly work, we find the sour smoke, which had so long been smouldering in his heart and choking his existence, changed into bright, clear flame. He has found the secret out at last, and it has filled his whole soul with blessedness. God is man's happiness. "Fear God, and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty of man."

And now, brethren, let us come to the meaning and the personal application of all this. There is a way—let us not shrink from saying it—there is a way in which sin may be made to minister to holiness. "To whomsoever much is forgiven the same loveth much." There was an everlasting truth in what our Messiah said to the moral Pharisees: "The publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you." Now, these are Christ's words; and we will not fear to boldly state the same truth, though it be liable to much misinterpretation. Past sin, brethren, may be made the stepping-stone to heaven. Let a man abuse that if he will by saying, "Then it is best to sin." A man may make the doctrine absurd, even shocking, by that inference, but it is true for all that. "All things work together for good to them that love God." All things, even sin. God can take even your sin, and make it work to your soul's sanctification. He can let you down into such an abyss of self-loathing and disgust, such life-weariness, and doubt, and misery and disappointment, that if he ever raises you again by the invigorating experience of the Love of Christ, you will rise stronger from your very fall, and in a manner secured against apostasy again. Solomon, King of Israel, sinned, and, by the strange power of the cross of Christ, that sin gave him deeper knowledge of himself,

deeper insight into the mystery of human life, more marvellous power of touching the souls of his brother men, than if he had not sinned. But forget not this, if ever a great sinner becomes a great saint, it will be through agonies which none but those who have sinned know.

Brethren, I speak to those among you who know something about what the world is worth, who have tasted its fruits, and found them like the Dead Sea apples—hollowness and ashes. By those foretastes of coming misery which God has already given you, those lonely feelings of utter wretchedness and disappointment when you have returned home palled and satiated from the gaudy entertainment, and the truth has pressed itself icy cold upon your heart, "Vanity of vanities"—is this worth living for? By all that, be warned. Be true to your convictions. Be honest with yourselves. Be manly in working out your doubts, as Solomon was. Greatness, Goodness, Blessedness, lie not in the life that you are leading now. They lie in quite a different path: they lie in a life hid with Christ in God. Before God is compelled to write that upon your heart in disgust and disappointment, learn "what is that good for the sons of men which they should do" all the days of their life under the heaven. Learn from the very greatness of your souls, which have a capacity for infinite agony, that you are in this world for a grander destiny than that of frittering away life in uselessness. •

Lastly, let us learn from this subject the covenant love of God. There is such a thing as love which rebellion cannot weary, which ingratitude cannot cool. It is the Love of God to those whom He has redeemed in Christ. "Did not Solomon, King of Israel, sin? and yet there was no king like him who was beloved of his God." Let that, my Christian brethren, be to us a truth not to teach carelessness, but thankfulness. Oh! trembling believer in Christ, are you looking into the dark future and fearing, not knowing what God will be to you at the last? Remember, Christ "having loved his own who are in the world loved them to the end." Your salvation is in the hands of Christ; the

everlasting arms are beneath you. The rock on which your salvation is built is love, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against you.

ELIJAH

1 KINGS xix. 4.—“But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper-tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough: now, O Lord, take away my life: for I am not better than my fathers.”

It has been observed of the holy men of Scripture, that their most signal failures took place in those points of character for which they were remarkable in excellence. Moses was the meekest of men—but it was Moses who “spake unadvisedly with his lips.” St. John was the apostle of charity; yet he is the very type to us of religious intolerance, in his desire to call down fire from heaven. St. Peter is proverbially the apostle of impetuous intrepidity: yet twice he proved a craven. If there were anything for which Elijah is remarkable, we should say it was superiority to human weakness. Like the Baptist he dared to arraign and rebuke his sovereign: like the commander who cuts down the bridge behind him, leaving himself no alternative but death or victory, he taunted his adversaries, the priests of Baal on Mount Carmel; making them gnash their teeth and cut themselves with knives, but at the same time ensuring for himself a terrible end, in case of failure, from his exasperated foes. And again, in his last hour, when he was on his way to a strange and unprecedented departure from this world—when the whirlwind and flame-chariot were ready, he asked for no human companionship. The bravest men are pardoned if one lingering feeling of human weakness clings to them at the last, and they desire a human eye resting on them—a human hand in theirs—a human presence. But Elijah would have rejected all. In harmony with the rest of his lonely, severe character, he desired to meet his Creator alone. Now it was this man—so stern, so

iron, so independent, so above all human weakness, of whom it was recorded that in his trial hour he gave way to a fit of petulance and querulous despondency to which there is scarcely found a parallel. Religious despondency, therefore, is our subject.

- I. The causes of Elijah's despondency.
- II. God's treatment of it.

- I. The causes of Elijah's despondency.
 1. Relaxation of physical strength.

On the reception of Jezebel's message, Elijah flies for his life—toils on the whole day—sits down under a juniper-tree, faint, hungry, and travel-worn; the gale of an Oriental evening, damp and heavy with languid sweetness, breathing on his face. The prophet and the man give way. He longs to die: you cannot mistake the presence of causes in part purely physical.

We are fearfully and wonderfully made. Of that constitution, which in our ignorance we call union of soul and body, we know little respecting what is cause and what is effect. We would fain believe that the mind has power over the body, but it is just as true that the body rules the mind. Causes apparently the most trivial: a heated room—want of exercise—a sunless day—a northern aspect—will make all the difference between happiness and unhappiness, between faith and doubt, between courage and indecision. To our fancy there is something humiliating in being thus at the mercy of our animal organism. We would fain find nobler causes for our emotions. We talk of the hiding of God's countenance, and the fiery darts of Satan. But the picture given here is true. The body is the channel of our noblest emotions as well as our sublimest sorrows.

Two practical results follow. First, instead of vilifying the body, complaining that our nobler part is chained down to a base partner, it is worth recollecting that the body too is the gift of God, in its way Divine: "the temple of the Holy Ghost;" and that to keep the body in temperance, soberness, and chastity, to guard it from pernicious influence,

and to obey the laws of health, are just as much religious as they are moral duties ; just as much obligatory on the Christian as they are on a member of a Sanitary Committee. Next, there are persons melancholy by constitution, in whom the tendency is incurable ; you cannot exorcise the phantom of despondency. But it is something to know that it is a phantom, and not to treat it as a reality—something taught by Elijah's history, if we only learn from it to be patient, and wait humbly the time and good pleasure of God.

Second Cause—Want of sympathy. "I, even I only, am left." Lay the stress on *only*. The loneliness of his position was shocking to Elijah. Surprising this : for Elijah wanted no sympathy in a far harder trial on Mount Carmel. It was in a tone of triumph that he proclaimed that he was the single, solitary prophet of the Lord, while Baal's prophets were 450 men.

Observe, however, the difference. There was in that case an opposition which could be grappled with : here there was nothing against which mere manhood was availing. The excitement was passed—the chivalrous look of the thing gone. To die as a martyr : yes, that were easy, in grand failure—but to die as a felon—to be hunted, caught, taken back to an ignominious death, flesh and blood recoiled from that.

And Elijah began to feel that popularity is not love. The world will support you when you have constrained its votes by a manifestation of power : and shrink from you when power and greatness are no longer on your side. "I, even I only, am left."

This trial is most distinctly realized by men of Elijah's stamp and placed under Elijah's circumstances. It is the penalty paid by superior mental and moral qualities, that such men must make up their minds to live without sympathy. Their feelings will be misunderstood, and their projects uncomprehended. They must be content to live alone. It is sad to hear such appeal from the present to the judgment of the future. Poor consolation ! Elijah has been judged at that bar. We are his posterity : our reverence this

day is the judgment of posterity on him. But to Elijah what is that now? Elijah is in that quiet country where the voice of praise and the voice of blame are alike unheard. Elijah lived and died alone: once only the bitterness of it found expression. But what is posthumous justice to the heart that ached *then*?

What greater minds like Elijah's have felt intensely, all we have felt in our own degree. Not one of us but what has felt his heart aching for want of sympathy. We have had our lonely hours, our days of disappointment, and our moments of hopelessness—times when our highest feelings have been misunderstood, and our purest met with ridicule.

Days when our heavy secret was lying unshared, like ice upon the heart. And then the spirit gives way: we have wished that all were over—that we could lie down tired, and rest like the children, from life—that the hour was come when we could put down the extinguisher on the lamp, and feel the last grand rush of darkness on the spirit.

Now, the final cause of this capacity for depression—the reason for which it is, granted us, is that it may make God necessary. In such moments it is felt that sympathy beyond human is needful. Alone, the world against him, Elijah turns to God. “It is enough: now, *O Lord*.”

3. Want of occupation.

As long as Elijah had a prophet's work to do, severe as that work was, all went on healthily: but his occupation was gone. To-morrow and the day after, what has he left on earth to do? The misery of having nothing to do proceeds from causes voluntary or involuntary in their nature. Multitudes of our race, by circumstances over which they have no control, in single life or widowhood—in straitened circumstances, are compelled to endure lonely days, and still more lonely nights and evenings. They who have felt the hours hang so heavy, can comprehend part of Elijah's sadness.

This misery, however, is sometimes voluntarily incurred. In artificial civilisation certain persons exempt themselves from the necessity of work. They eat the bread which has

been procured by the sweat of the brow of others—they skim the surface of the thought which has been ploughed by the sweat of the brain of others. They are reckoned the favoured ones of fortune, and envied: Are they blessed? The law of life is, in the sweat of thy brow thou shalt eat bread. No man can evade that law with impunity. Like all God's laws it is its own executioner. It has strange penalties annexed to it—would you know them? Go to the park, or the esplanade, or the solitude after the night of dissipation, and read the penalties of being useless, in the sad, jaded, listless countenances—nay, in the very trifles which must be contrived to create excitement artificially. Yet these very eyes could, dull as they are, beam with intelligence: on many of those brows is stamped the mark of possible nobility. The fact is, that the capacity of ennui is one of the signatures of man's immortality. It is his very greatness which makes inaction misery. If God had made us only to be insects, with no nobler care incumbent on us than the preservation of our lives, or the pursuit of happiness, we might be content to flutter from sweetness to sweetness, and from bud to flower. But if men with souls live only to eat and drink and be amused, is it any wonder if life be darkened with despondency?

Fourth Cause—Disappointment in the expectation of success. On Carmel the great object for which Elijah had lived seemed on the point of being realized. Baal's prophets were slain—Jehovah acknowledged with one voice: false worship put down. Elijah's life-aim—the transformation of Israel into a kingdom of God, was all but accomplished. In a single day all this bright picture was annihilated.

Man is to desire success, but success rarely comes. The wisest has written upon life its sad epitaph. "All is vanity," *i. e.* nothingness.

The tradesman sees the noble fortune for which he lived, every coin of which is the representative of so much time and labour spent, squandered by a spendthrift son. The purest statesmen find themselves at last neglected, and rewarded by defeat. Almost never can a man look back on

life and say that its anticipations have been realized. For the most part life is disappointment, and the moments in which this is keenly realized are moments like this of Elijah's.

II. God's treatment of it.

1. First he recruited his servant's exhausted strength. Read the history. Miraculous meals are given—then Elijah sleeps, wakes, and eats : on the strength of that goes forty days' journey. In other words, like a wise physician, God administers food, rest, and exercise, and then, and not till then, proceeds to expostulate—for before, Elijah's mind was unfit for reasoning.

Persons come to the ministers of God in seasons of despondency ; they pervert with marvellous ingenuity all the consolation which is given them : turning wholesome food into poison. Then we begin to perceive the wisdom of God's simple homely treatment of Elijah, and discover that there are spiritual cases which are cases for the physician rather than the divine.

2. Next Jehovah calmed his stormy mind by the healing influences of Nature. He commanded the hurricane to sweep the sky, and the earthquake to shake the ground. He lighted up the heavens till they were one mass of fire. All this expressed and reflected Elijah's feelings. The mode in which Nature soothes us is by finding meeter and nobler utterance for our feelings than we can find in words—by expressing and exalting them. In expression there is relief. Elijah's spirit rose with the spirit of the storm. Stern wild defiance—strange joy—all by turns were imaged there. Observe, "*God* was not in the wind," nor in the fire, nor in the earthquake. It was Elijah's stormy self reflected in the moods of the tempest, and giving them their character.

Then came a calmer hour. Elijah rose in reverence—felt tenderer sensations in his bosom. He opened his heart to gentler influences, till at last out of the manifold voices of Nature there seemed to speak, not the stormy

passions of the man, but the "still small voice" of the harmony and the peace of God.

There are some spirits which must go through a discipline analogous to that sustained by Elijah. The storm-struggle must precede the still small voice. There are minds which must be convulsed with doubt before they can repose in faith. There are hearts which must be broken with disappointment before they can rise into hope. There are dispositions which, like Job, must have all things taken from them, before they can find all things again in God. Blessed is the man who, when the tempest has spent its fury, recognises his Father's voice in its under-tone, and bares his head and bows his knee, as Elijah did. To such spirits, generally those of a stern rugged cast, it seems as if God had said, "In the still sunshine and ordinary ways of life you cannot meet me, but like Job, in the desolation of the tempest you shall see My Form, and hear My Voice, and know that your Redeemer liveth."

3. Besides, God made him feel the earnestness of life. What *doest* thou here, Elijah? Life is for doing. A prophet's life for nobler doing—and the prophet was not doing but moaning.

Such a voice repeats itself to all of us, rousing us from our lethargy, or our despondency, or our protracted leisure, "What *doest* thou here?" here in this short life. There is work to be done—evil put down—God's Church purified—good men encouraged—doubting men directed—a country to be saved—time going—life a dream—eternity long—one chance, and but one for ever. What *doest* thou here?

Then he went on further, "Arise, go on thy way." That speaks to us: on thy way. Be up and doing—fill up every hour, leaving no crevice or craving for a remorse or a repentance to creep through afterwards. Let not the mind brood on self: save it from speculation, from those stagnant moments in which the awful teachings of the spirit grope into the unfathomable unknown, and the heart torments itself with questions which are insoluble except to an active

life. For the awful Future becomes intelligible only in the light of a felt and active present. Go, return on thy way if thou art desponding—*on thy way* health of spirit will return.

4. He completed the cure by the assurance of victory. "Yet have I left me seven thousand in Israel who have not bowed the knee to Baal." So then, Elijah's life had been no failure after all. Seven thousand at least in Israel had been braced and encouraged by his example, and silently blessed him perhaps for the courage which they felt. In God's world for those that are in earnest there is no failure. No work truly done—no word earnestly spoken—no sacrifice freely made, was ever made in vain. Never did the cup of cold water given for Christ's sake lose its reward.

We turn naturally from this scene to a still darker hour and more august agony. If ever failure seemed to rest on a noble life, it was when the Son of Man, deserted by his friends, heard the cry which proclaimed that the Pharisees had successfully drawn the net round their divine victim. Yet from that very hour of defeat and death there went forth the world's life—from that very moment of apparent failure there proceeded forth into the ages the spirit of the conquering Cross. Surely if the cross says anything, it says that apparent defeat is real victory, and that there is a heaven for those who have *nobly and truly* failed on earth.

Distinguish, therefore, between the Real and the Apparent. Elijah's apparent success was in the shouts of Mount Carmel. His real success was in the unostentatious, unsurmised obedience of the seven thousand who had taken his God for their God.

A lesson for all. For teachers who lay their heads down at night sickening over their thankless task. Remember the power of *indirect* influences: those which distil from a life, not from a sudden, brilliant effort. The former never fail: the latter often. There is good done of which we can never predicate the when or where. Not in the

124 The Pharisees and Sadducees

flushing of a pupil's cheek : of the glistening of an attentive eye : not in the shining results of an examination does your real success lie. It lies in that invisible influence on character which He alone can read who counted the seven thousand nameless ones in Israel.

For ministers again—what is ministerial success? Crowded churches—full aisles—attentive congregations—the approval of the religious world—much impression produced? Elijah thought so : and when he found out his mistake, and discovered that the applause on Carmel subsided into hideous stillness, his heart well-nigh broke with disappointment. Ministerial success lies in altered lives and obedient humble hearts : unseen work recognised in the judgment-day.

What is a public man's success? That which can be measured by feast-days and the number of journals which espouse his cause? Deeper, deeper far must he work who works for eternity. In the eye of That, nothing stands but gold, Real work—all else perishes.

Get below appearances, below glitter and show. Plant your foot upon reality. Not in the jubilee of the myriads on Carmel, but in the humble silence of the hearts of the seven thousand, lay the proof that Elijah had not lived in vain.

THE PHARISEES AND SADDUCEES AT JOHN'S BAPTISM

MATTHEW iii. 7.—“ But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? ”

It seems that the Baptist's ministry had been attended with almost incredible success, as if the population of the country had been roused in mass by the tidings of his doctrine. “ Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized by him in Jordan, confessing their sins.”

The success of his ministry was tested by the numbers that he baptized. Not so a modern ministry. Ministerial success is not shown now by the numbers who listen. Not mere impression, but altered character, marks success. Not by startling, nor by electrifying congregations, but by turning men from darkness unto light, from the power of Satan unto God, is the work done. With John, however, it was different. He was on earth to do a special work—the work of the axe, not the trowel; to throw down, not to build; to startle, not to instruct; and therefore his baptism was simply symbolized by water, the washing away of the past, whereas that of Christ was symbolized by fire, the touching of the life and heart with the living flame of a heavenlier life. Whoever, therefore, came to John for baptism, possessed conviction of the truth of that which John taught, and thereby so far tested the fidelity and success of his ministry.

Bearing, then, in mind, that coming to John's baptism was the seal of his success, and that his baptism contained in symbolical form the whole substance of his teaching, these are the two topics of the text:—

- I. The meaning wrapped up in John's message.
- II. The Baptist's astonishment at his own success.

I. The meaning of John's message. His baptism implied to those who came to put themselves under its protection that they were in danger, for it was connected with the warning "Flee from the wrath to come!"

Future retribution has become to us a kind of figment. Hell is the world of shadows. The tone in which educated men speak of it still, is often only that good-humoured condescension which makes allowance for childish superstition.

Part of this incredulity arises from the confessedly symbolical intimations of scripture on the subject. We read of the fire and the worm: of spirits being salted with fire: of a lake of fire and brimstone. All this tells solely of physical suffering. And accordingly, for centuries, this was the predominant conception of Christendom on the subject. Scarcely

126 The Pharisees and Sadducees

any other element was admitted. Whoever has seen those paintings on which the master-spirits in Art have thrown down the conceptions of their age, will remember that hideous demons, distorted countenances, and waves of flame represent the whole idea. And in that immortal work in which he who sang of hell, purgatory, and heaven, has embodied the belief of his day, still the same fact prevails. You read of the victims of unchaste life hurried on the dark whirlwind for ever; of the heretics in their coffins of intense fire; and of the guilty spirits who are plunged deep down in "thick-ribbed ice." But in those harrowing pictures which his genius has painted with such vividness, there is not one idea of mental suffering embodied. It is all bodily, awful, intolerable torture. Now all this we believe no longer. The circles of hell and the mountain of purgatory are as fabulous to us as the Tartarus to the heathens. Singular, that in an age in which the chief aim of science appears to be to get rid of physical pain and discomfort, as if these were the worst evils conceivable, the idea of a bodily hell should be just the one at which we have learnt to smile. But with the form, we have also dispossessed ourselves of belief in the reality of retribution at all.

Now Scripture language is symbolical. There is no salt, no worm, no fire to torture. I say not that a diseased soul may not form for itself a tenement hereafter, as here, peculiarly fitted to be the avenue of suffering; but unquestionably we cannot build upon these expressions a material hell.

Hell is the infinite terror of the soul, whatever that may be. To one man it is pain. Rid him of that, he can bear all degradation. To another it is public shame. Save him from that, and he will creep and crawl before you to submit to any reptile meanness. "Honour me now, I pray thee, before the people," till Samuel turns from the abject thing in scorn. To others, the infinite terror is that, compared with which, all these would be a bed of roses. It is the hell of having done wrong—the hell of having had a spirit from God, pure, with high aspirations, and to be con-

scious of having dulled its delicacy, and degraded its desires—the hell of having quenched a light brighter than the sun's—of having done to another an injury that through time and through eternity can never be undone—infinite, maddening remorse—the hell of knowing that every chance of excellence, and every opportunity of good, has been lost for ever. This is the infinite terror :—this is wrath to come.

You doubt that?—Have you ever marked that striking fact, the connexion of the successive stages of the soul? How sin can change the countenance, undermine the health, produce restlessness? Think you the grave will end all that? That by some magic change, the moral being shall be buried there, and the soul rise again so changed in every feeling that the very identity of being would be lost, and it would amount to the creation of a new soul? Say you that God is love? Oh! out look round this world. The aspect of things is stern: very stern. If they be ruled by love, it is a love which does not shrink from human agony. There is a law of infinite mercy here, but there is a law of boundless rigour too. Sin and you will suffer—that law is not reversed. The young, and the gentle, and the tender, are inexorably subjected to it. We would shield them if we could: but there is that which says they shall not be shielded. They shall weep, and fade, and taste of mortal anguish, even as others. Carry that out into the next world, and you have “wrath to come.”

John's baptism, besides, implied the importance of confession. “They were baptized . . . confessing their sins.” On the eve of a promised new life, they were required to acknowledge the iniquity of past life. In the cure of our spiritual maladies there is a wondrous efficacy, to use a homely phrase, in making a “clean breast.” There is something strengthening, something soothing, and at the same time something humbling, in acknowledging that we have done wrong. There is a pride which cannot bear pity in us. There is a diseased sensitiveness which shrinks from the smart of acknowledgment; and yet that smart must be borne before we can be truly soothed. When was it that the

128 The Pharisees and Sadducees

younger son in the parable received the ring, and the robe, and the banquet, which represent the rapture of the sense of being forgiven? When he had fortitude enough to go back mile by mile, step by step, every inch of the way he had gone wrong, had borne unflinchingly the sneer of his father's domestics, and, worse than all, the sarcasms of his immaculate brother, and manfully said out, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee." When was it that the publican went down *justified* to his house? When he said, even before a supercilious Pharisee, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" When did the royal delinquent hear the words, "The Lord hath also put away thy sin?" When he gave the sacrifice of his lips—"I have sinned before the Lord." And when did the church of Ephesus rise into the brightest model of a perfect church that has yet been exhibited on earth? After her converts had publicly come forward, burnt those manuscripts which were called "Ephesian letters" to the value of 50,000 pieces of silver, "confessed and showed their deeds." There is a profound truth in the popular anxiety that a murderer should confess before he dies. It is an instinctive feeling that a true death is better than a false life—that to die with unacknowledged guilt is a kind of lie. To acknowledge his sin is to put it from him, to abjure it—to refuse to acknowledge it—to separate it from him—to say I will keep it as mine no more: then it is gone. Who here has a secret of guilt lying like lead upon his heart? As he values serenity of soul, let that secret be made known. And if there be one to-day who is impressed or touched by all this, let him beware how he procrastinates that which was done when John baptized. The iron that once was cooled may never be warmed again—the heart that once had its flood-gates open, and has delayed to pour out the stagnation of its wretchedness, may be closed for ever.

Once more, John's baptism implied the necessity of a renewal of heart. We lose part of the significance of that ceremony from its transplantation away from a climate in which it was natural and appropriate.

Ablution in the East is almost a religious duty : the dust and heat weigh upon the spirits and heart like a load : the removal is refreshment and happiness. And it was impossible to see that significant act—in which the convert went down into the water, travel-worn and soiled with dust, disappeared for one moment, and then emerged pure and fresh—without feeling that the symbol answered to and interpreted a strong craving of the human heart. It is the desire to wash away that which is past and evil. We would fain go to another country and begin life afresh. We look upon the grave almost with complacency, from the fancy that there we shall lie down to sleep and wake fresh and new. It was this same longing that expressed itself in heathenism by the fabled river of forgetfulness, of which the dead must drink before they can enter into rest.

Now to that craving John gave reality and meaning when he said, "Behold the Lamb of God!" For else that craving is but a sick fond wish. Had John merely said, "Flee from the wrath to come!" he would have filled man's life with the terrors of anticipated hell. Had he only said, "My baptism implies that ye must be pure," he would have crushed men's hearts with the feeling of impossibility : for excellence without Christ is but a dream. He gave meaning and promise to all when he said, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world."

Sin-laden and guilty men—the end of all the Christian ministry is to say that out with power, "Behold the Lamb of God!" Divine life and death ! to have had one glimpse of which, with its ennobling impulses, it were worth while to have endured a life of suffering. When we believe that the sacrifice of that Lamb meant love to us, our hearts are lightened of their load : the past becomes as nothing, and life begins afresh. Christ is the River of Forgetfulness in which bygone guilt is overwhelmed.

II. The Baptist's astonishment at his own success. It was a singular scene which was exhibited in those days on the banks of Jordan. There was a crowd of human beings, each having a history of his own, men who have long

130 The Pharisees, and Sadducees

mouldered in Earth's dust, but who were living then in fresh and vigorous existence. Think of it. Busy life was moving there, beings who had their hopes and fears about time and eternity: to whom life was dear as it is to us at this day. They had come to be cured of that worst of human maladies the aching of a hollow heart; and a single mortified man was bending over them, whose countenance bore all that peculiar aspect of saintliness which comes from spare diet and austere habits, and all that unruffled composure which comes from lonely communings with God:—a solitary man, who had led a hermit's life, but was possessed of rare sagacity in worldly matters;—for, hermit as he was, John took no half views of men and things. There was nothing morbid in his view of life: there was sound common sense in the advice he gave the different classes which came to him. "Repent" with him did not mean, Come with me into the wilderness to live away from the world, but it meant this: Go back to the world, and live above it, each doing his work in an unworldly spirit. It was a strange spectacle, men of the world coming with implicit reverence to learn the duties of active life from a man whose world was the desert, and who knew nothing of active life except by hearsay.

Now what was the secret of this power by which he chained the hearts of men as by a spell?

One point in the secret of this success was a thing which we see every day. Men of thought and quiet contemplation exercise a wonderful influence over men of action. We admire that which we are not ourselves. The man of business owns the control of the man of religious thoughtfulness. Like coalesces in this world with unlike. The strong and the weak, the contemplative and the active, bind themselves together. They are necessary for each other. The active soldiers and the scheming publicans came to the lonely ascetic John, to hear something of that still, inner life, of which their own career could tell them nothing.

A second cause of this success appears to have been, that

it was a ministry of terror. Fear has a peculiar fascination. As children love the tale of the supernatural which yet makes them shudder, so do men, as it would seem, find a delight in the pictures of eternal woe which terrify them. Partly from the pleasure which there is in vivid emotions, and partly perhaps from a kind of feeling of expiation in the horror which is experienced. You could not go among the dullest set of rustics and preach graphically and terribly of hell-fire without ensuring a large audience. The preaching of John in this respect differed from the tone of Christ's. Christ taught much that God is Love. He spoke a great deal of the Father which is in Heaven. He instructed in those parables which required thoughtful attention, exercise of mind, and a gently sensitive conscience. He spoke didactic, calm discourses, very engaging, but with little excitement in them : such discourses as the Sermon on the Mount, respecting goodness, purity, duties ; which assuredly if any one were to venture so to speak before a modern congregation, would be stigmatized as a moral essay. Accordingly, His success was much less marked than that of John's. No crowds were baptized as His followers : one hundred and twenty, in an upper chamber, appear to have been the fruits of His life-work. To teach so, is assuredly not the way to make strong impressions ; but it is the way to work deeply, gloriously, for eternity. How many of John's terrified Pharisees and Sadducees, suppose we, retained the impression six months ?

What is your religion ? Excitability, romance, impression, fear ? Remember, excitement has its uses ; impression has its value. John, in all circumstances of his appearance and style of teaching, impressed by excitement. Excitement, warmed feelings, make the first actings of religious life and the breaking of inveterate habits easier. But excitement and impression are not religion. Neither can you trust to the alarm produced by the thought of eternal retribution. Ye that have been impressed, beware how you let those impressions die away. Die they will, and must : we cannot live in excitement for ever ; but beware of their

132 The Pharisees, and Sadducees

leaving behind them nothing except a languid, jaded heart. If God ever gave you the excitements of religion, breaking in upon your monotony, as John's teaching broke in upon that of Jerusalem, take care. There is no restoring of elasticity to the spring that has been over-bent. Let impression pass on at once to acting.

We have another cause to assign for John's success. Men felt that he was real. Reality is the secret of all success. Religion in Jerusalem had long become a thing of forms. Men had settled into a routine of externals, as if all religion centred in these. Decencies and proprieties formed the substance of human life. And here was a man in God's world once more, who felt that religion is an everlasting reality. Here was a man once more, to tell the world that life is sliding into the abyss; that all we see is but a shadow; that the invisible Life within is the only real life. Here was a man who could feel the splendours of God shining into his soul in the desert without the aid of forms. His locust-food, his hair-garment, his indifference to earthly comforts, spoke out once more that one at least could make it a conviction to live and die upon, that man does not live on bread alone, but on the living word which proceedeth out of the mouth of God. And when that crowd dispersed at sunset, and John was left alone in the twilight, with the infinite of darkness deepening round him, and the roll of Jordan by his side, reflecting the chaste clear stars, there was something there higher than Pharisaic forms to speak to him:—There was heaven and eternity to force him to be real. This life was swiftly passing. What is it to a man living like John, but a show and a dream? He was homeless upon earth.—Well—but beyond—beyond—in the blue eternities above, there was the prophet's home. He had cut himself off from the solaces of life. He was to make an enemy of the man of honour, Herod. He had made an enemy of the man of religion, the Pharisee. But he was passing into that country, where it matters little whether a man has been clothed in finest linen or in coarsest camel's hair, that still country, where the struggle-storm of life is over, and such as John

find their rest at last in the home of God, which is reserved for the True and Brave. If perpetual familiarity with such thoughts as these cannot make a man real, there is nothing in this world that can.

And now, look at this man, so disciplined. Life to John was a reality. The citizens of Jerusalem could not go to him, as they might have gone to the schools of their rabbis, for learned subtleties, or to the groves of Athenian literature for melting imagery. Speech falls from him, sharp—rugged—cutting :—a word and no more. “Repent !”—“wrath to come.” The axe is laid at the root of the trees. Fruitless trees will be cast into the fire. He spoke as men speak when they are in earnest, simply and abruptly, as if the graces of oratory were out of place. And then, that life of his ! The world could understand it. There was written on it, in letters that needed no magnifying glass to read, “Not of this world.”

It is, after all, this which tells—the reality of unworldliness. The world is looking on to see what religious people mean. It has a most profound contempt for unreality. Such a man as John comes before them. Well, we understand that :—we do not like him : get him out of the way, and kill him if he interferes with us—but it is genuine. They then turn and see other men drawing ingenious distinctions between one kind of amusement and another—indulging themselves on the sabbath-day and condemning others who do similar things, and calling that unworldliness. They see that a religious man has a shrewd eye to his interests—is quick at making a bargain—captivated by show and ostentation—affects titled society. The world is very keensighted : it looks through the excitement of your religious meetings, quietly watches the rest of your scandal, scans your consciousness, and the question which the world keeps putting pertinaciously is, Are these men in earnest ? Is it any marvel if Christian unreality is the subject of scoffs and bitter irony ?

Let men see that you are real—inconsistent, it may be, sinful : oh ! full of sin—impetuous—hasty—perhaps stern—

134 The Pharisees, and Sadducees

John was. But compel them to feel that you are in earnest. This is the secret of influence.

So much, then, for the cause of success. Now let us analyze that success a little more closely, by considering the classes of men on whom that influence told.

First of all, we read of soldiers, publicans, and the poor people, coming to John for advice, and with the acknowledgment of guilt; and we do not read that their arrival excited the smallest emotion of astonishment in John's bosom. The wonder was not there. No wonder that the poor, whose lot in this world is hard, should look wistfully for another. No wonder that soldiers, with their prompt habits of obedience and their perpetual opportunities of self-devotion, should recognise with reverence the type of heroic life which John presented. No wonder that the guilty publicans should come for purification of heart. For is it not true that the world's outcasts may be led by their very sin to Christ? It is no wonder to see a saddened sinner seeking in the disappointment and weariness of solitary age that which he rejected in the heat of youth. Why, even the world is not astonished when it sees the sinner become the saint. Of course, the world has its own sarcastic account to give. Dissipation leads to weariness, and weariness to satiety, and satiety to devotion, and so your great sinner becomes a great saint, and serves God when all his emotions are exhausted. Be it so. He who knew our nature well, knew that marvellous revolutions go on in the soul of a man whom the world counts lost. In our wildest wanderings there is sometimes a love, strong as a father's, tender as a mother's, watching over us, and bringing back the erring child again. Know you not the law of nature? Have you never seen how out of chaos and ferment nature brings order again? Life out of death, beauty out of corruption? Such, gainsay it who will, often is the history of the rise of saintliness and purity out of a disappointed, bruised, and penitent spirit. When the life-hopes have become a wreck—when the cravings of the heart for keen excitement have been ministered to so abundantly

as to leave nothing but loathing and self-reproach behind—when innocence of heart is gone—yes—even then—scoff who will—the voice of Him is heard, who so dearly purchased the right to say it: “Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

John was not surprised that such came to him, owning the power of life-giving truth.

But among those who came, there were two classes who did move him to marvel. The first was the moral, self-satisfied formalist. The second was the calm, metaphysical, reasoning infidel. When he saw the Pharisees and Sadducees coming, he said: “Who hath warned *you*?”

Now who were these men?

The Pharisees were men who rested satisfied with the outward. The form of religion which varies in all ages, that they wanted to stereotype. The inner heart of religion—the unchangeable—justice—mercy—truth—that they could not feel. They had got their two schools of orthodoxy—the school of Shammai and the school of Hillel; and, under the orthodoxy of these popular idols of the day, they were content to lose their own power of independent thought: souls that had shrunk away from all goodness and nobleness, and withered into the mummy of a soul. They could jangle about the breadth of a phylactery. They could discuss, as if it were a matter of life and death, ecclesiastical questions about tithe. They could decide to a furlong the length of journey allowable on the Sabbath-day. But they could not look with mercy upon a broken heart pouring itself out to God in His temple—nor suffer a hungry man to rub an ear of corn on the Sabbath—nor cover the shame of a tempted sister or an erring brother. Men without souls, from whose narrow hearts the grandeur of everlasting truth was shut out.

There was another class in Israel as different from the Pharisees as man can be from man. The Sadducee could not be satisfied with the creed of Pharisaism, and had begun to cross-examine its pretensions. They felt that the thing which stood before them there, challenging the exclusive name of religion, with its washing of cups, its fastings, its

136 The Pharisees and Sadducees

parchment texts, this had nothing in it of the Eternal and the Infinite. This comes not from the Almighty God, and so from doubt they passed on to denial. The usual order had taken place. The reaction from superstition is infidelity. The reaction from ultra-strictness is laxity. The reaction from Pharisaism was the Sadducee. And the Sadducee, with a dreadful daring, had had the firmness to say: "Well then, there is no life to come. That is settled. I have looked into the abyss without trembling. There is no phantom there. There is neither angel, spirit, nor life to come. And this glorious thing, man, with his deep thoughts, and his great, unsatisfied heart, his sorrows and his loves, godlike and immortal as he seems, is but dust animated for a time, passing into the nothingness out of which he came." That cold and hopeless creed was the creed of Sadduceeism. Human souls were trying to live on that, and find it enough.

And the strange thing was, that these men, so positive in their creed, so distinct in their denial, so intolerant of the very name of future existence, crowded to John to make those confessions, and promise that new life, which were meet for men who desired to flee from the wrath to come. Wrath to come! What had the infidel to do with that? Repentance unto life! Why should the denier of life listen to that? Fruits meet for repentance! What had the formalist to do with that rebuke, whose life was already all that could be needed? "O generation of vipers," said the prophet, in astonishment, "who hath warned *you* to flee from the wrath to come?"

I deduce, from those facts which astonished John, two truths. Formalism, even morality, will not satisfy the conscience of man. Infidelity will not give rest to his troubled spirit. It is a pregnant lesson, if we will only read it thoughtfully, to consider those two classes going up for baptism. That heart of man which the moralist tells us is so pure and excellent, the light of day has shone into it, and behold, in the moralist's self, it is not pure, but polluted and miserable: else, what has the Pharisee to do

with the symbol of new life which he has gone to John to use? That clear, unbiassed intellect with which the sceptic reached his conclusions, behold it is not clear nor unbiassed! It has been warped by an evil life. His heart is restless, and dark, and desolate: else, why is that Sadducee trembling on Jordan's brink? There is a something which they want, both Pharisee and Sadducee, and they come to see if baptism will give it them. Strangely moved indeed must those men have been—ay, shaken to the inmost soul—before they could so contradict their own profession as to acknowledge that there was a hollowness in their hearts. We almost fancy we can stand at the water's edge and hear the confession which was wrung from their lips, hot-burning and choked with sobs, during the single hour in which reality had forced itself upon their souls:—"It is a lie!—we are *not* happy—we are miserable—Prophet of the Invisible! what hast thou got to tell us of that awful other world?"

For when man comes to front the everlasting God, and look the splendour of His judgments in the face, personal integrity, the dream of spotlessness and innocence, vanish into thin air: your decencies, and your church-goings, and your regularities, and your attachment to a correct school and party, your gospel formulas of sound doctrine—what is all that in front of the blaze of the wrath to come?

And scepticism, too, how philosophical soever, and manly it may appear, will it rock the conscience with an everlasting lullaby? Will it make, with all its reasonings, the tooth of the worm less sharp, and the fire less fierce that smoulders inwardly? Let but the plain, true man speak. We ask from him no rhetoric. We require no eloquence. Let him but say, in his earnestness, Repent—or—Wrath to come—and then what has infidelity to fall back upon?

There is rest in this world nowhere except in Christ the Manifested Love of God. Trust in excellence, and the better you become, the keener is the feeling of deficiency. Wrap up all in doubt, and there is a stern voice that will thunder at last out of the wilderness upon your dream.

A heart renewed—a loving heart—a penitent and humble heart—a heart broken and contrite, purified by love—that and only that is the rest of man. Spotlessness may do for angels—Repentance unto Life is the highest that belongs to man.

THE STAR IN THE EAST

MATTHEW ii. 1, 2.—“Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of Herod the king, behold there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.”

OUR subject is the Manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles. The King of the Jews has become the Sovereign of the world: a fact, one would think, which must cause a secret complacency in the heart of all Jews. For that which is most deeply working in modern life and thought is the Mind of Christ. His name has passed over our institutions, and much more has His spirit penetrated into our social and domestic existence. In other words, a Hebrew mind is now, and has been for centuries, ruling Europe.

But the gospel which He proclaimed was not limited to the Hebrews: it was a gospel for the nations. By the death of Christ, God had struck His deathblow at the root of the hereditary principle. “We be the seed of Abraham” was the proud pretension of the Israelite: and he was told by Christ’s gospel that spiritual dignity rests not upon spiritual descent, but upon spiritual character. New tribes were adopted into the Christian union: and it became clear that there was no distinction of race in the spiritual family. The Jewish rite of circumcision, a symbol of exclusiveness, cutting off one nation from all others, was exchanged for Baptism, the symbol of universality, proclaiming the nearness of all to God, His Paternity over the human race, and the Sonship of all who chose to claim their privileges.

This was a Gospel for the world: and nation after nation accepted it. Churches were formed; the Kingdom which

is the domain of Love grew; the Roman empire crumbled into fragments; but every fragment was found pregnant with life. It brake not as some ancient temple might break, its broken pieces lying in lifeless ruin, overgrown with weeds: rather as one of those mysterious animals break, of which, if you rend them asunder, every separate portion forms itself into a new and complete existence. Rome gave way; but every portion became a Christian kingdom, alive with the mind of Christ, and developing the Christian idea after its own peculiar nature.

The portion of Scripture selected for the text and for the gospel of the day, has an important bearing on this great Epiphany. The "wise men" belonged to a creed of very hoary and venerable antiquity; a system, too, which had in it the elements of strong vitality. For seven centuries after, the Mahometan sword scarcely availed to extirpate it—indeed could not. They whom the Mahometan called fire-worshippers, clung to their creed with vigour and tenacity indestructible, in spite of all his efforts.

Here, then, in this act of homage to the Messiah, were the representatives of the highest then existing influences of the world, doing homage to the Lord of a mightier influence, and reverently bending before the dawn of the Star of a new and brighter Day. It was the first distinct turning of the Gentle mind to Christ; the first instinctive craving after a something higher than Gentilism could ever satisfy.

In this light our thoughts arrange themselves thus:

- I. The expectation of the Gentiles.
- II. The Manifestation or Epiphany.

I. The expectation: "Where is He that is born King of the Jews? ~~for~~ we have seen His star in the east, and are come to worship Him."

Observe, i. The craving for Eternal Life. The "wise men" were, "Magians," that is, Persian priests. The name, however, was extended to all the eastern philosophers who professed that religion, or even that philosophy. The

Magians were chiefly distinguished by being worshippers of the stars, or students of astronomy.

Now astronomy is a science which arises from man's need of religion ; other sciences spring out of wants bounded by this life. For instance, anatomy presupposes disease. There would be no prying into our animal frame, no anatomy, were there not a malady to stimulate the inquiry. Navigation arises from the necessity of traversing the seas to appropriate the produce of other countries. Charts, and maps, and soundings are made, because of a felt earthly want. But in astronomy the first impulse of mankind came not from the craving of the intellect, but from the necessities of the soul.

If you search down into the constitution of your being till you come to the lowest deep of all, underlying all other wants, you will find a craving for what is infinite : a something that desires perfection : a wish that nothing but the thought of that which is eternal can satisfy. To the untutored mind nowhere was that want so called into consciousness, perhaps, as beneath the mighty skies of the East. Serene and beautiful are the nights in Persia, and many a wise man in earlier days, full of deep thoughts, went out into the fields, like Isaac, to meditate at eventide. God has so made us that the very act of looking *up* produces in us perceptions of the sublime. And then those skies in their calm depths mirroring that which is boundless in space and illimitable in time, with a silence profound as death and a motion gliding on for ever, as if symbolizing eternity of life—no wonder if men associated with them their highest thoughts, and conceived them to be the home of Deity. No wonder if an Eternal Destiny seemed to sit enthroned there. No wonder if they seemed to have in their mystic motion an invisible sympathy with human life and its mysterious destinies. No wonder if he who could read best their laws was reckoned best able to interpret the duties of this life, and all that connects man with that which is invisible. No wonder if in those devout days of young thought, science was only another name for religion, and

the Priest of the great temple of the universe was also the Priest in the temple made with hands. Astronomy was the religion of the world's youth.

The Magians were led by the star to Christ; their astronomy was the very pathway to their Saviour.

Upon this I make one or two remarks.

1. The folly of depreciating human wisdom. Of all vanities the worst is the vanity of ignorance. It is common enough to hear learning decried, as if it were an opposite of religion. If that means that science is not religion, and that the man who can calculate the motions of the stars may never have bowed his soul to Christ, it contains a truth. But if it means, as it often does, that learning is a positive incumbrance and hindrance to religion, then it is as much as to say that the God of nature is not the God of grace; that the more you study the Creator's works, the further you remove from Himself: nay, we must go further to be consistent, and hold, as most uncultivated and rude nations do, that the state of idiocy is nearest to that of inspiration.

There are expressions of St. Paul often quoted as sanctioning this idea. He tells his converts to beware "lest any man spoil you through philosophy." Whereupon we take for granted that modern philosophy is a kind of antagonist to Christianity. This is one instance out of many of the way in which an ambiguous word misunderstood, becomes the source of infinite error. Let us hear St. Paul. He bids Timothy "beware of profane and old wives' fables." He speaks of "endless genealogies"—"worshipping of angels"—"intruding into those things which men have not seen." This was the philosophy of those days: a system of wild fancies spun out of the brain—somewhat like what we might now call demonolatry; but as different from philosophy as any two things can differ.

They forget, too, another thing. Philosophy has become Christian; science has knelt to Christ. There is a deep significance in that homage of the Magians. For it in fact was but a specimen and type of that which science has been

doing ever since. The mind of Christ has not only entered into the Temple, and made it the house of prayer : it has entered into the temple of science, and purified the spirit of philosophy. This is its spirit now, as expounded by its chief interpreter : "Man, the interpreter of nature, knows nothing, and can do nothing, except that which nature teaches him." What is this but science bending before the Child, becoming childlike, and, instead of projecting its own fancies upon God's world, listening reverently to hear what It has to teach him? In a similar spirit too, spoke the greatest of philosophers, in words quoted in every child's book : "I am but a child, picking up pebbles on the shore of the great sea of Truth."

Oh ! be sure all the universe tells of Christ and leads to Christ. Rightly those ancient Magians deemed, in believing that God was worshipped truly in that august temple. The stars preach the mind of Christ. Not as of old, when a mystic star guided their feet to Bethlehem ; but now, to the mind of the astronomer, they tell of Eternal Order and Harmony : they speak of changeless law where no caprice reigns. You may calculate the star's return ; and to the day, and hour, and minute it will be there. This is the fidelity of God. These mute masses obey the law impressed upon them by their Creator's Hand, unconsciously : and that law is the law of their own nature. To understand the laws of our nature, and consciously and reverently to obey them, that is the mind of Christ, the sublimest spirit of the Gospel.

I remark again,—This universe may be studied in an irreverent spirit. In Dan. ii. 48, we find the reverence which was paid to science. Daniel among the Chaldees was made chief of the wise men, that is, the first of the Magians : and King Nebuchadnezzar bowed before him, with incense and oblations. In later days we find that spirit changed. Another king, Herod, commands the wise men to use their science for the purpose of letting him know where the Child was. In earlier times they honoured the priest of nature : in later times they made use of him.

Only by a few is science studied now in the sublime and reverent spirit of old days. A vulgar demand for utility has taken the place of that lowly prostration with which the world listened to the discoveries of truth. The discovery of some new and mighty agent, by which the east and west are brought together in a moment, awakens chiefly the emotion of delight in us that correspondence and travelling will be quickened. The merchant congratulates himself upon the speedier arrival of the news which will give him the start of his rivals, and enable him to outrace his competitors in the competition of wealth. Yet what is this but the utilitarian spirit of Herod, seeing nothing more solemn in a mysterious star than the means whereby he might crush his supposed Rival?

There is a spirit which believes that "godliness is gain," and aims at being godly for the sake of advantage—which is honest, because honesty is the best policy—which says, Do right, and you will be the better, that is, the richer for it. There is a spirit which seeks for wisdom simply as a means to an earthly end—and that often a mean one. This is a spirit rebuked by the nobler reverence of the earlier days of Magianism. Knowledge for its own pure sake. God for His own sake. Truth for the sake of truth. This was the reason for which in earlier days, men read the aspect of the heavens.

2. Next, in this craving of the Gentiles, we meet with traces of the yearning of the human soul for light. The Magian system was called the system of Light about seven centuries B.C. A great reformer (Zoroaster) had appeared, who either restored the system to its purity, or created out of it a new system. He said that Light is Eternal—that the Lord of the Universe is Light; but because there was an eternal Light, there was also an eternal possibility of the absence of Light. Light and Darkness therefore were the eternal principles of the universe—not equal principles, but one the negation of the other. He taught that the soul of man needs light—a light external to itself, as well as in itself. As the eye cannot see in darkness, and is useless, so is there

a capacity in the soul for light ; but it is not itself light ; it needs the Everlasting light from outside itself.

Hence the stars became worshipped as the symbols of this light. But by degrees these stars began to stand in the place of the Light Himself. This was the state of things in the days of these Magians.

Magianism was now midway between its glory and its decline. For its glory we must go back to the days of Daniel, when a monarch felt it his privilege to do honour to the priest of Light—when that priest was the sole medium of communication between Deity and man, and through him alone, “Oromasdes” made his revelations known—when the law given by the Magian, revealed by the eternal stars, was “the law of the Medes and Persians which altereth not.” For its lowest degradation we must pass over about half-a-century from the time we are now considering, till we find ourselves in Samaria, in the presence of Simon the Magian. He gave himself out for the great power of God. He prostituted such powers and knowledge as he possessed to the object of making gain. Half-dupe, half-impostor, in him the noble system of Light had sunk to pretty charlatanism : Magianism had degenerated into Magic.

Midway between these two periods, or rather nearer to the latter, stood the Magian of the text. There is a time in the history of every superstition when it is respectable, even deserving reverence, when men believed it—when it is in fact associated with the highest feelings that are in man, and the channel even for God’s manifestation to the soul. And there is a time when it becomes less and less credible; when clearer science is superseding its pretensions : and then is the period in which one class of men, like Simon, keep up the imposture : the priests who will not let the old superstition die, but go on, half-impostors, half-deceived by the strong delusion wherewith they believe their own lie. Another class, like Herod, the wise men of the world, who patronize it for their own purposes, and make use of it as an engine of state. Another still, who turn from side to side, feeling with horror the old, and all that they held dear, crumbling away

beneath them—the ancient lights going out, more than half suspecting the falsehood of all the rest, and with an earnestness amounting almost to agony, leaving their old homes and inquiring for fresh light.

Such was the posture of these Magians. You cannot enter into their questions or sympathize with their wants unless you realize all this. For that desire for light is one of the most impassioned of our nobler natures. That noble prayer of the ancient world (εἰ δὲ φάει καὶ ὀλεσσον) "Give light, and let us die:" can we not feel it? Light—light. O if the result were the immediate realization of the old fable, and the blasting of the daring spirit in the moment of Revelation of its God—yet give us light. The wish for light; the expectation of the manifestation of God, is the mystery which lies beneath the history of the whole ancient world.

II. The Epiphany itself.

First, they found a king. There is something very significant in the fact of that king being discovered as a child. The royal child was the answer to their desires. There are two kinds of monarchy, rule, or command. One is that of hereditary title; the other is that of Divine Right. There are kings of men's making, and kings of God's making. The secret of that command which men obey involuntarily, is submission of the Ruler himself to law. And this is the secret of the Royalty of the Humanity of Christ. No principle through all His Life is more striking, none characterizes it so peculiarly, as His submission to another Will. "I came not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me." "The words which I speak, I speak not of Myself." His commands are not arbitrary. They are not laws given on authority only—they are the eternal laws of our humanity, to which He Himself submitted: obedience to which alone can make our being attain its end. This is the secret of His kingship—"He became obedient . . . wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him."

And this is the secret of all influence and all command. Obedience to a law above you, subjugates minds to you who never would have yielded to mere will. "Rule thyself, thou rulest all."

2. Next, observe the adoration of the Magians—very touching and full of deep truth. The wisest of the world bending before the *Child*. Remember the history of Magianism. It began with awe, entering into this world beneath the serene skies of the east: in Wonder and Worship. It passed into priestcraft and scepticism. It ended in Wonder and Adoration, as it had begun; only with a truer and nobler meaning.

This is but a representation of human life. "Heaven lies around us in our infancy." The child looks on this world of God's as *one*, not many—all beautiful—wonderful—God's—the creation of a Father's hand. The man dissects—breaks it into fragments—loses love and worship in speculation and reasoning—becomes more manly, more independent, and less irradiated with a sense of the presence of the Lord of all; till at last, after many a devious wandering, if he be one whom the Star of God is leading blind by a way he knows not, he begins to see all as One again, and God in all. Back comes the Childlike spirit once more in the Christianity of old age. We kneel before the Child—we feel that to adore is greater than to reason—that to love, and worship, and believe, bring the soul nearer heaven than scientific analysis. The Child is nearer God than we.

And this, too, is one of the deep sayings of Christ—"Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."

3. Lastly, In that Epiphany we have to remark the Magians' joy. They had seen the star in the east. They followed it—it seemed to go out in dim obscurity. They went about inquiring: asked Herod, who could tell them nothing: asked the scribes, who only gave them a vague direction. At last the star shone out once more, clear before

them in their path. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy."

Perhaps the hearts of some of us can interpret that. There are some who have seen the star that shone in earlier days go out; quench itself in black vapours or sour smoke. There are some who have followed many a star that turned out to be but an ignis fatuus, one of those bright exhalations which hover over marshes and churchyards, and only lead to the chambers of the dead, or the cold damp pits of disappointment: and, O the blessing of "exceeding joy," after following in vain—after inquiring of the great men and learning nothing—of the religious men and finding little—to see the Star at last resting over "the place where the young Child lies"—after groping the way alone, to see the star stand still—to find that Religion is a thing far simpler than we thought—that God is near us—that to kneel and adore is the noblest posture of the soul. For, whoever will follow with fidelity his *own* star, God will guide him aright. He spoke to the Magians by the star; to the shepherds by the melody of the heavenly host; to Joseph by a dream; to Simeon by an inward revelation. "Gold, and frankincense, and myrrh,"—these, and ten times these, were poor and cheap to give for that blessed certainty that the star of God is on before us.

Two practical hints in conclusion.

1. A hint of immortality. That star is now looking down on the wise men's graves; and if there be no life to come, then this is the confusion—that mass of inert matter is pursuing its way through space, and the minds that watched it, calculated its movements, were led by it through aspiring wishes to holy adorations—those minds, more precious than a thousand stars, have dropped out of God's universe. And then God cares for mere material masses more than for spirits, which are the emanation and copy of Himself. Impossible! "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." God is the Father of our *Spirits*. Eternity and immeasurableness belong to thought alone. You may measure the cycles of that star by years and

148 John's Rebuke of Herod

miles: Can you bring any measurement which belongs to time or space, by which you can compute the length or breadth or the duration of one pure thought, one aspiration, one moment of love? This is eternity. Nothing but thought can be immortal.

2. Learn, finally, the truth of the Epiphany by heart. To the Jew it chiefly meant that the Gentile, too, could become the child of God. But to us?—Is that doctrine obsolete? Nay, it requires to be reiterated in this age as much as in any other. There is a spirit in all our hearts whereby we would monopolize God, conceiving of Him as an unapproachable Being; whereby we may terrify other men outside our own pale, instead of as the Father that is near to all, whom we may approach, and whom to adore is blessedness.

This is our Judaism: we do not believe in the Epiphany. We do not believe that God is the Father of the world—we do not actually credit that He has a star for the Persian priest, and celestial melody for the Hebrew shepherd, and an unsyllabled voice for all the humble and inquiring spirits in His world. Therefore remember, Christ has broken down the middle wall of partition—He has revealed God as *Our* Father, proclaimed that there is no distinction in the spiritual family, and established a real Brotherhood on earth.

JOHN'S REBUKE OF HEROD

LUKE iii. 19, 20.—“But Herod the tetrarch, being reproved by him for Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done, added yet this above all, that he shut up John in prison.”

THE life of John the Baptist divides itself into three distinct periods. Of the first we are told almost nothing, but we may conjecture much. We are told that he was in

the deserts till his showing unto Israel. It was a period probably, in which, saddened by the hollowness of all life in Israel, and perplexed with the controversies of Jerusalem, the controversies of Sadducee with Pharisee, of formalist with mystic, of the disciples of one infallible Rabbi with the disciples of another infallible Rabbi, he fled for refuge to the wilderness, to see whether God could not be found there by the heart that sought Him, without the aid of churches, rituals, creeds, and forms. This period lasted thirty years.

The second period is a shorter one. It comprises the few months of his public ministry. His difficulties were over; he had reached conviction enough to live and die on. He knew not all, but he knew something. He could not baptize with the Spirit, but he could at least baptize with water. It was not given to him to build up, but it was given to him to pull down all false foundations. He knew that the highest truth of spiritual life was to be given by One that should come after. What he had learned in the desert was contained in a few words—Reality lies at the root of religious life. Ye must be real, said John. "Bring forth fruits meet for repentance." Let each man do his own duty; let the rich impart to those who are not rich; let the publican accuse no man falsely; let the soldier be content with his wages. The coming kingdom is not a mere piece of machinery which will make you all good and happy without effort of your own. Change yourselves, or you will have no kingdom at all. Personal reformation, personal reality, *that* was John's message to the world. An incomplete one; but he delivered it as his all, manfully; and his success was signal, astonishing even to himself. Successful it was, because it appealed to all the deepest wants of the human heart. It told of peace to those who had been agitated by tempestuous passion. It promised forgetfulness of past transgression to those whose consciences smarted with self-accusing recollections. It spoke of refuge from the wrath to come to those who had felt it a fearful expectation to fall into the hands of an angry God. And the result of

150 John's Rebuke of Herod

that message, conveyed by the symbol of baptism, was that the desert swarmed with crowds who owned the attractive spell of the power of a new life made possible. Warriors, paupers, profligates—some admiring the nobleness of religious life, others needing it to fill up the empty hollow of an unsatisfied heart; the penitent, the heart-broken, the worldly, and the disappointed, all came. And with them there came two other classes of men, whose approach roused the Baptist to astonishment.

The formalist, not satisfied with his formality, and the infidel, unable to rest on his infidelity—they came too—startled, for one hour at least, to the real significance of life, and shaken out of unreality. The Baptist's message wrung the confession from their souls. "Yes, our system will not do. We are not happy after all; we are miserable. Prophet, whose solitary life, far away there in the desert, has been making to itself a home in the mysterious and the invisible, what hast thou got to tell us from that awful other world? What are we to do?" These things belong to a period of John's life anterior to the text.

The prophet has been hitherto in a self-selected solitude, the free wild desert, opening his heart to the strange sights and sounds through which the grand voice of oriental nature speaks of God to the soul, in a way that books cannot speak. We have arrived at the third period of his history. We are now to consider him as the tenant of a *compelled* solitude, in the dungeon of a capricious tyrant. Hitherto, by that rugged energy with which he battled with the temptations of this world, he has been shedding a glory round human life. We are now to look at him equally alone; equally majestic, shedding by martyrdom, almost a brighter glory round human death. He has hitherto been receiving the homage of almost unequalled popularity. We are now to observe him reft of every admirer, every soother, every friend. He has been hitherto overcoming the temptations of existence by entire seclusion from them all. We are now to ask how he will stem those seductions when he is brought into the very midst of them, and the whole outward aspect of

his life has laid aside its distinctive and peculiar character ; when he has ceased to be the anchorite, and has become the idol of a court.

Much instruction, brethren, there ought to be in all this, if we only knew rightly how to bring it out, or even to paint in anything like intelligible colours the picture which our own minds have formed. Instructive, because human life must ever be instructive. How a human spirit contrived to get its life accomplished in this confused world : what a man like us, and yet no common man, felt, did, suffered ; how he fought, and how he conquered ; if we could only get a clear possession and firm grasp of *that*, we should have got almost all that is worth having in truth, with the technicalities stripped off, for what is the use of truth except to teach man how to live ? There is a vast value in genuine biography. It is good to have real views of what Life is, and what Christian Life may be. It is good to familiarize ourselves with the history of those whom God has pronounced the salt of the earth. We cannot help contracting good from such association.

And just one thing respecting this man whom we are to follow for some time to-day. Let us not be afraid of seeming to rise into a mere enthusiastic panegyric of a man. It is a rare man we have to deal with, one of God's heroic ones, a true conqueror ; one whose life and motives it is hard to understand without feeling warmly and enthusiastically about them. One of the very highest characters, rightly understood, of all the Bible. Panegyric such as we can give, what is it after he has been stamped by his Master's eulogy, "A prophet ? Yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist." In the verse which is to serve us for our guidance on this subject there are two branches which will afford us fruit of contemplation. It is written, "Herod being *reproved* by John for Herodias."

Here is our first subject of thought. The truthfulness of Christian character.

And then next, he "shut up John in prison." • •

152 John's Rebuke of Herod

Here is our second topic. 'The apparent failure of religious life.

The point which we have to look at in this section of the Baptist's life is the truthfulness of religious character. For the prophet was now in a sphere of life, altogether new. He had got to the third act of his history. The first was performed right manfully in the desert—that is past. He has now become a known man, celebrated through the country, brought into the world, great men listening to him, and in the way, if he chooses it, to become familiar with the polished life of Herod's court. For this we read: Herod observed John, that is, cultivated his acquaintance, paid him marked attention, heard him, did many things at his bidding, and heard him gladly.

For thirty long years John had lived in that far-off desert, filling his soul with the grandeur of solitude, content to be unknown, not conscious, most likely, that there was anything supernatural in him—living with the mysterious God in silence. And then came the day when the qualities, so secretly nursed, became known in the great world: men felt that there was a greater than themselves before them, and then came the trial of admiration, when the crowds congregated round to listen. And all that trial John bore uninjured, for when those vast crowds dispersed at night he was left alone with God and the universe once more. That prevented his being spoilt by flattery. But now comes the great trial. John is transplanted from the desert to the town: he has quitted simple life: he has come to artificial life. John has won a king's attention, and now the question is, Will the diamond of the mine bear polishing without breaking into shivers? Is the iron prophet melting into voluptuous softness? Is he getting the world's manners and the world's courtly insincerity? Is he becoming artificial through his change of life? My Christian brethren, we find nothing of the kind. There he stands in Herod's voluptuous court the prophet of the desert still, unseduced by blandishment from his high loyalty, and fronting his patron and his prince with the stern unpalatable truth of God.

John's Rebuke of Herod 153

It is refreshing to look on such a scene as this—the highest, the very highest moment, I think, in all John's history; higher than his ascetic life. For after all, ascetic life such as he had led before, when he fed on locusts and wild honey, is hard only in the first resolve. When you have once made up your mind to that, it becomes a habit to live alone. To lecture the poor about religion is not hard. To speak of unworldliness to men with whom we do not associate, and who do not see *our* daily inconsistencies, *that* is not hard. To speak contemptuously of the world when we have no power of commanding its admiration, *that* is not difficult. But when God has given a man accomplishments, or powers, which would enable him to shine in society, and he can still be firm, and steady, and uncompromisingly true; when he can be as undaunted before the rich as before the poor; when rank and fashion cannot subdue him into silence: when he hates moral evil as sternly in a great man as he would in a peasant, there is truth in that man. This was the test to which the Baptist was submitted. And now contemplate him for a moment; forget that he is an historical personage, and remember that he was a man like us. Then comes the trial. All the habits and rules of polite life would be whispering such advice as this: "Only keep your remarks within the limits of politeness. If you cannot approve, be silent; you can do no good by finding fault with the great." We know how the whole spirit of a man like John would have revolted at that. Imprisonment? Yes. Death? Well, a man can die but once,—anything but not cowardice,—not meanness,—not pretending what I do not feel, and disguising what I do feel. Brethren, death is not the worst thing in this life; it is not difficult to die—five minutes and the sharpest agony is past. The worst thing in this life is cowardly untruthfulness. Let men be rough if they will, let them be unpolished, but let Christian men in all they say be sincere. No flattery, no speaking smoothly to a man before his face, while all the time there is a disapproval of his conduct in the heart. The thing we want in Christianity is not politeness, it is sincerity.

154 John's Rebuke of Herod

Now, there are three things which we remark in this truthfulness of John. The first is its straightforwardness, the second is its unconsciousness, and the last its unselfishness. The straightforwardness is remarkable in this circumstance, that there is no indirect coming to the point. At once, without circumlocution, the true man speaks. "It is not lawful for thee to have her." There are some men whom God has gifted with a rare simplicity of heart, which makes them utterly incapable of pursuing the subtle excuses which can be made for evil. There is in John no morbid sympathy for the offender: "It is not lawful." He does not say, "It is *best* to do otherwise; it is unprofitable for your own happiness to live in this way." He says plainly, "It is wrong for you to do this evil."

Earnest men in this world have no time for subtleties and casuistry. Sin is detestable, horrible, in God's sight, and when once it has been made clear that it is not lawful, a Christian has nothing to do with toleration of it. If we dare not tell our patron of his sin we must give up his patronage. In the next place there was unconsciousness in John's rebuke. We remark, brethren, that he was utterly ignorant that he was doing a fine thing. There was no sidelong glance, as in a mirror, of admiration for himself. He was not feeling, This is brave. He never stopped to feel that after ages would stand by, and look at that deed of his, and say, "Well done." His reproof comes out as the natural impulse of an earnest heart. John was the last of all men to feel that he had done anything extraordinary. And this we hold to be an inseparable mark of truth. No true man is conscious that he is true; he is rather conscious of insincerity. No brave man is conscious of his courage; bravery is *natural* to him. The skin of Moses' face shone after he had been with God, but Moses wist not of it. There are many of us who would have prefaced that rebuke with a long speech. We should have begun by observing how difficult it was to speak to a monarch, how delicate the subject, how much proof we were giving of our friendship. We should have asked the great man to accept it as a proof of our devotion. John

does nothing of this. Prefaces betray anxiety about self; John was not thinking of himself. He was thinking of God's offended law, and the guilty king's soul. Brethren, it is a lovely and a graceful thing to see men natural. It is beautiful to see men sincere without being haunted with the consciousness of their sincerity. There is a sickly habit that men get of looking into themselves, and thinking how they are appearing. We are always unnatural when we do that. The very tread of one who is thinking how he appears to others, becomes dizzy with affectation. He is too conscious of what he is doing, and self-consciousness is affectation. Let us aim at being natural. And we can only become natural by thinking of God and duty, instead of the way in which we are serving God and duty.

There was, lastly, something exceedingly unselfish in John's truthfulness. We do not build much on a man's being merely true. It costs some men nothing to be true, for they have none of those sensibilities which shrink from inflicting pain. There is a surly bitter way of speaking truth which says little for a man's heart. Some men have not delicacy enough to feel that it is an awkward and a painful thing to rebuke a brother: they are in their element when they can become censors of the great. John's truthfulness was not like that. It was the earnest loving nature of the man which made him say sharp things. Was it to gratify spleen that he reproved Herod for all the evils he had done? Was it to minister to a diseased and disappointed misanthropy? Little do we understand the depth of tenderness which there is in a rugged, true nature, if we think that. John's whole life was an iron determination to crush self in everything.

Take a single instance. John's ministry was gradually superseded by the ministry of Christ. It was the moon waning before the Sun. They came and told him that, "Rabbi, He to whom thou barest witness beyond Jordan baptizeth, and all men come unto Him." Two of his own personal friends, apparently some of the last he had left, deserted him, and went to the new teacher.

And now let us estimate the keenness of that trial. Remember John was a man: he had tasted the sweets of influence; that influence was *flying* away, and just in the prime of life he was to become *nothing*. Who cannot conceive the keenness of that trial? Bearing that in mind—what is the prophet's answer? One of the most touching sentences in all Scripture—calmly, meekly, the hero recognises his destiny—"He must increase, but I must decrease." He does more than recognise it—he rejoices in it, rejoices to be nothing, to be forgotten, despised, so as only Christ can be everything. "The friend of the bridegroom rejoiceth because he heareth the bridegroom's voice, this my joy is fulfilled." And it is *this* man, with self so thoroughly crushed—the outward self by bodily austerities, the inward self by Christian humbleness—it is this man who speaks so sternly to his sovereign. "It is not lawful." Was there any gratification of human feeling there? Or was not the rebuke unselfish? Meant for God's honour, dictated by the uncontrollable hatred of all evil, careless altogether of personal consequences?

Now it is this, my brethren, that *we* want. The world-spirit can rebuke as sharply as the Spirit which was in John; the world-spirit can be severe upon the great when it is jealous. The worldly man cannot bear to hear of another's success, he cannot endure to hear another praised for accomplishments, or another succeeding in a profession, and the world can fasten very bitterly upon a neighbour's faults, and say, "It is not lawful." We expect that in the world. But that this should creep among religious men, that *we* should be bitter—that we, *Christians*, should suffer jealousy to enthrone itself in our hearts—that we should find fault from spleen, and not from love—that we should not be able to be calm and gentle, and sweet-tempered, when we decrease, when our powers fail—that is the shame. The love of Christ is intended to make such men as John, such high and heavenly characters. What is our Christianity worth if it cannot teach us a truthfulness, an unselfishness, and a generosity beyond the world's?

We are to say something in the second place of the apparent failure of Christian life.

The concluding sentence of this verse informs us that John was shut up in prison. And the first thought which suggests itself is, that a magnificent career is cut short too soon. At the very outset of ripe and experienced manhood the whole thing ends in failure. John's day of active usefulness is over; at thirty years of age his work is done; and what permanent effect have all his labours left? The crowds that listened to his voice, awed into silence by Jordan's side, we hear of them no more. Herod heard John gladly, did much good by reason of his influence. What was all that worth? The prophet comes to himself in a dungeon, and wakes to the bitter conviction, that his influence had told much in the way of commanding attention, and even winning reverence, but very little in the way of gaining souls; the bitterest, the most crushing discovery in the whole circle of ministerial experience. All this was seeming failure. And this, brethren, is the picture of almost all human life. To some moods, and under some aspects, it seems, as it seemed to the psalmist, "Man walketh in a vain shadow and disquieteth himself in vain." Go to any churchyard, and stand ten minutes among the grave-stones; read inscription after inscription recording the date of birth, and the date of death, of him who lies below, all the trace which myriads have left behind, of their having done their day's work on God's earth, that is failure, or seems so. Cast the eye down the columns of any commander's despatch after a general action. The men fell by thousands; the officers by hundreds. Courage, high hope, self-devotion, ended in smoke—forgotten by the time of the next list of slain: that is the failure of life once more. Cast your eye over the shelves of a public library—there is the hard toil of years, the product of a life of thought; all that remains of it is there in a worm-eaten folio, taken down once in a century. Failure of human life again. Stand by the most enduring of all human labours, the pyramids of Egypt. One hundred thousand men, year by year, raised

158 John's Rebuke of Herod

those enormous piles to protect the corpses of the buried from rude inspection. The spoiler's hand has been there, and the bodies have been rifled from their mausoleum, and three thousand years have written "failure" upon that. In all that, my Christian brethren, if we look no deeper than the surface, we read the grave of human hope, the apparent nothingness of human labour.

And then look at this history once more. In the isolation of John's dying hour, there appears failure again. When a great man dies we listen to hear what he has to say, we turn to the last page of his biography first, to see what he had to bequeath to the world as his experience of life. We expect that the wisdom, which he has been hiving up for years, will distil in honeyed sweetness then. It is generally not so. There is stupor and silence at the last. "How dieth the wise man?" asks Solomon: and he answers bitterly, "As the fool." The martyr of truth dies privately in Herod's dungeon. We have no record of his last words. There were no crowds to look on. We cannot describe how he received his sentence. Was he calm? Was he agitated? Did he bless his murderer? Did he give utterance to any deep reflections on human life? All that is shrouded in silence. He bowed his head, and the sharp stroke fell flashing down. We know that, we know no more—apparently a noble life abortive.

And now let us ask the question distinctly, Was all this, indeed, failure? No, my Christian brethren, it was sublimest victory. John's work was no failure; he left behind him no sect to which he had given his name, but his disciples passed into the service of Christ, and were absorbed in the Christian Church. Words from John had made impressions, and men forgot in after years *where* the impressions first came from, but the day of judgment will not forget. John laid the foundations of a temple, and others built upon it. He laid it in struggle, in martyrdom. It was covered up like the rough masonry below ground, but when we look round on the vast Christian Church, we are looking at the superstructure of John's toil.

There is a lesson for us in all that, if we will learn it. Work, true work, done honestly and manfully for Christ, *never* can be a failure. Your own work, my brethren, which God has given you to do, whatever that is, let it be done truly. Leave eternity to show that it has not been in vain in the Lord. Let it but be work, it will tell. True Christian life is like the march of a conquering army into a fortress which has been breached; men fall by hundreds in the ditch. Was their fall a failure? Nay, for their bodies bridge over the hollow, and over them the rest pass on to victory. The quiet religious worship that we have this day—how comes it to be ours? It was purchased for us by the constancy of such men as John, who freely gave their lives. We are treading upon a bridge of martyrs. The suffering was theirs—the victory is ours. John's career was no failure. Yet we have one more circumstance which *seems* to tell of failure. In John's prison, solitude, misgiving, black doubt, seem for a time to have taken possession of the prophet's soul. All that we know of those feelings is this;—John while in confinement sent two of his disciples to Christ, to say to Him, "Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another?" Here is the language of painful uncertainty. We shall not marvel at this, if we look steadily at the circumstances. Let us conceive John's feelings. The enthusiastic child of nature, who had roved in the desert, free as the air he breathed, is now suddenly arrested, and his strong restless heart limited to the four walls of a narrow dungeon. And there he lay startled. An eagle cleaving the air with motionless wing, and in the midst of his career brought from the black cloud by an arrow to the ground, and looking round with his wild, large eye, stunned, and startled there; just such was the free prophet of the wilderness, when Herod's guards had curbed his noble flight, and left him alone in his dungeon. Now there is apparent failure here, brethren; it is not the thing which we should have expected. We should have expected that a man who had lived so close to God all his life, would have no misgivings in his last hours. But, my brethren, it is not so.

It is the strange truth that some of the highest of God's servants are tried with darkness on the dying bed. Theory would say, when a religious man is laid up for his last struggles, now he is alone for deep communion with his God. Fact very often says, "No—now he is alone, as his Master was before him, in the wilderness to be tempted of the devil." Look at John in imagination, and you would say, "Now his rough pilgrimage is done. He is quiet, out of the world, with the rapt foretaste of heaven in his soul." Look at John in fact. He is agitated, sending to Christ, not able to rest, grim doubt wrestling with his soul, misgiving for one last black hour whether all his hope has not been delusion. There is one thing we remark here by the way. Doubt often comes from inactivity. We cannot give the philosophy of it, but this is the fact, Christians who have nothing to do but to sit thinking of themselves, meditating, sentimentalising, are almost sure to become the prey of dark, black misgivings. John struggling in the desert needs no proof that Jesus is the Christ. John shut up became morbid and doubtful immediately. Brethren, all this is very marvellous. The history of a human soul *is* marvellous. We are mysteries, but here is the practical lesson of it all. For sadness, for suffering, for misgiving, there is no remedy but stirring and doing.

Now look once more at these doubts of John's. All his life long John had been wishing and expecting that the kingdom of God would come. The kingdom of God is Right triumphant over Wrong, moral evil crushed, goodness set up in its place, the true man recognised, the false man put down and forgotten. All his life long John had panted for that; his hope was to make men better. He tried to make the soldiers merciful, and the publicans honest, and the Pharisees sincere. His complaint was, Why is the world the thing it is? All his life long he had been appealing to the invisible justice of Heaven against the visible brute force which he saw around him. Christ had appeared, and his hopes were straining to the utmost. "Here is the Man!" And now behold, here is

no kingdom of heaven at all, but one of darkness still, oppression and cruelty triumphant, Herod putting God's prophet in prison, and the Messiah quietly letting things take their course. Can that be indeed Messiah? All this was exceedingly startling. And it seems that then John began to feel the horrible doubt whether the whole thing were not a mistake, and whether all that which he had taken for inspiration were not, after all, only the excited hopes of an enthusiastic temperament. Brethren, the prophet was well nigh on the brink of failure.

But let us mark—that a man has doubts—that is not the evil; all earnest men must expect to be tried with doubts. All men who feel, with their whole souls, the value of the truth which is at stake, cannot be satisfied with a “perhaps.” Why, when all that is true and excellent in this world, all that is worth living for, is in that question of questions, it is no marvel if we sometimes wish, like Thomas, to see the prints of the nails, to know whether Christ be indeed our Lord or not. Cold hearts are not anxious enough to doubt. Men who love will have their misgivings at times; that is not the evil. But the evil is, when men go on in that languid, doubting way, content to doubt, proud of their doubts, morbidly glad to talk about them, liking the romantic gloom of twilight, without the manliness to say—I must and will know the truth. That did not John. Brethren, John appealed to Christ. He did exactly what we do when we pray—and he got his answer. Our Master said to his disciples, Go to my suffering servant, and give him proof. Tell John the things ye see and hear—“The blind see, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the Gospel is preached.” Now, there is a deep lesson wrapped up in this. We get a firm grasp of truth by prayer. Communion with Christ is the best proof of Christ's existence and Christ's love. It is so even in human life. Misgivings gather darkly round our heart about our friend in his absence; but we seek his frank smile, we feel his affectionate grasp: our suspicions go to sleep again. It is just so in religion. No man is in the habit of praying to God in

Christ, and then doubts whether Christ is He "that should come." It is in the power of prayer to realize Christ, to bring him near, to make you feel His life stirring like a pulse within you. Jacob could not doubt whether he had been with God when his sinew shrunk. John could not doubt whether Jesus was the Christ when the things He had done were pictured out so vividly in answer to his prayer. Let but a man live with Christ anxious to have his own life destroyed, and Christ's life established in its place, losing himself in Christ, that man will have all his misgivings silenced. These are the two remedies for doubt—Activity and Prayer. He who works, and *feels* he works—he who prays, and *knows* he prays, has got the secret of transforming life-failure into life-victory.

In conclusion, brethren, we make three remarks which could not be introduced into the body of this subject. The first is—Let young and ardent minds, under the first impressions of religion, beware how they pledge themselves by any open profession to more than they can perform. Herod warmly took up religion at first, courted the prophet of religion, and then when the hot fit of enthusiasm had passed away, he found that he had a clog round his life from which he could only disengage himself by a rough, rude effort. Brethren, whom God has touched, it is good to count the cost before you begin. If you give up present pursuits *impetuously*, are you sure that present impulses will last? Are you quite certain that a day will not come when you will curse the hour in which you broke altogether with the world? Are you quite sure that the revulsion back again, will not be as impetuous as Herod's, and your hatred of the religion which has become a clog, as intense as it is now ardent?

Many things doubtless there are to be given up—amusements that are dangerous, society that is questionable. What we give up, let us give up, not from quick feeling, but from principle. Enthusiasm is a lovely thing, but let us be calm in what we do. In that solemn, grand thing—Christian life—one step backward is religious death.

Once more we get from this subject the doctrine of a resurrection. John's life was hardness, his end was agony. That is frequently Christian life. Therefore, says the apostle, if there be no resurrection the Christian's choice is wrong; "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, then are we of all men most miserable." Christian life is not visible success—very often it is the apparent opposite of success. It is the resurrection of Christ working itself out *in* us; but it is very often the Cross of Christ imprinting itself on us very sharply. The highest prize which God has to give here is martyrdom. The highest style of life is the Baptist's—heroic, enduring, manly love. The noblest coronet which any son of man can wear is a crown of thorns. Christian, *this* is not your rest. Be content to feel that this world is not your home. Homeless upon earth, try more and more to make your home in heaven above, with Christ.

Lastly, we have to learn from this, that devotedness to Christ is our only blessedness. It is surely a strange thing to see the way in which men crowded round the austere prophet, all saying, "Guide us, we cannot guide ourselves." Publicans, Pharisees, Sadducees, Herod, whenever John appears, all bend before him, offering him homage and leadership. How do we account for this? The truth is, the spirit of man groans beneath the weight of its own freedom. When a man has no guide, no master but himself, he is miserable; we want guidance, and if we find a man nobler, wiser than ourselves, it is almost our instinct to prostrate our affections before that man, as the crowds did by Jordan, and say, "Be my example, my guide, my soul's sovereign." That passionate need of worship—hero-worship it has been called—is a primal, universal instinct of the heart. Christ is the answer to it. Men will not do; we try to find men to reverence thoroughly, and we cannot do it. We go through life, finding guides, rejecting them one after another. expecting nobleness and finding meanness; and we turn away with a recoil of disappointment. •

There is no disappointment in Christ. Christ can be

164 Early Development of Jesus

our souls' sovereign. Christ can be our guide. Christ can absorb all the admiration which our hearts long to give. We want to worship men. These Jews wanted to worship man. They were right—man is the rightful object of our worship; but in the roll of ages there has been but one man whom we can adore without idolatry,—the Man Christ Jesus.

THE EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF JESUS

LUKE ii. 40.—¹⁴ And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon him."

THE ecclesiastical year begins with Advent, then comes Christmas-day. The first day of the natural year begins with the infancy of the Son of Man. To-day the gospel proceeds with the brief account of the early years of Jesus.

The infinite significance of the life of Christ is not exhausted by saying that He was a perfect man. The notion of the earlier Socinians that He was a pattern man (*ψίλος άνθρωπος*) commissioned from Heaven with a message to teach men how to live, and supernaturally empowered to live in that perfect way Himself, is immeasurably short of truth. For perfection merely human does not attract; rather it repels. It may be copied in form. It cannot be imitated in spirit,—for men only imitate that from which enthusiasm and life are caught,—for it does not inspire nor fire with love.

Faultless men and pattern children—you may admire them, but you admire coldly. Praise them as you will, no one is better for their example. No one blames them, and no one loves them: they kindle no enthusiasm; they create no likeness of themselves: they never reproduce themselves in other lives—the true prerogative of all original life.

Early Development of Jesus 165

If Christ had been only a faultless Being, He would never have set up in the world a new type of character, which at the end of two thousand years is fresh and life-giving and inspiring still. He never would have regenerated the world. He never would have "drawn all men unto Him," by being lifted up a self-sacrifice, making self-devotion beautiful. In Christ the Divine and Human blended: Immutability joined itself to Mutability. There was in Him the Divine which remained fixed; the Human which was constantly developing. One uniform Idea and Purpose characterized His whole life, with a Divine immutable unity throughout, but it was subject to the laws of human growth. For the soul of Christ was not cast down upon this world a perfect thing at once. Spotless?—yes. Faultless?—yes. Tempted, yet in all points without sin?—yes. But perfection is more than faultlessness. All scripture coincides in telling us that the ripe perfection of His manhood was reached step by step. There was a power and a Life within Him which were to be developed, which could only be developed, like all human strength and goodness, by toil of brain and heart. Life up-hill all the way: and every footprint by which He climbed left behind for us, petrified on the hard rock, and indurated into history for ever, to show us when, and where, and how He toiled and won.

Take a few passages to prove that His perfection was gained by degrees, "It became Him for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through suffering." Again, "Behold, I cast out devils, and do cures to-day and to-morrow, and the third day I shall be *perfected*." "Though He were a Son, yet *learned* He obedience." And in the context, "Jesus *increased*." . . .

Now see the result of this aspect of His perfectibility. In that changeless element of His Being which beneath all the varying phases of growth remained Divinely faultless, we see that which we can adore. In the ever-changing, ever-growing, subject therefore to feebleness and endearing mutability, we see that which brings Him near to us:

166 Early Development of Jesus

makes Him lovable, at the same time that it interprets us to ourselves.

Our subject is the early development of Jesus. In this text we read of a threefold growth.

I. In strength. II. In wisdom. III. In grace.

First, it speaks to us simply of his early development, "The child grew."

In the case of all rare excellence that is merely human, it is the first object of the biographer of a marvellous man to seek for surprising stories of his early life. The appetite for the marvellous in this matter is almost instinctive and invariable. Almost all men love to discover the early wonders which were prophetic of after-greatness. Apparently, the reason is that we are unwilling to believe that wondrous excellence was attained by slow, patient labour. We get an excuse for our own slowness and stunted growth, by settling it once for all, that the *original* differences between such men and us were immeasurable. Therefore it is, I conceive, that we seek so eagerly for anecdotes of early precocity.

In this spirit the fathers of the primitive church collected legends of the early life of Christ, stories of superhuman infancy: what the infant and the child said and did. Many of these legends are absurd: all, as resting on no authority, are rejected.

Very different from this is the spirit of the Bible narrative. It records no marvellous stories of infantine sagacity or miraculous power, to feed a prurient curiosity. Both in what it tells and in what it does not tell, one thing is plain, that the human life of the Son of God was *natural*. There was first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn. In what it does *not* say: because, had there been anything preternatural to record, no doubt it would have been recorded. In what it *does* say: because that little is all unaffectedly simple. One anecdote, and two verses of general description, that is all which is told us of the Redeemer's childhood.

Early Development of Jesus 167

The Child, it is written, grew. Two pregnant facts. He was a child, and a child that grew in heart, in intellect, in size, in grace, in favour, with God. Not a man in child's years. No hotbed precocity marked the holiest of infancies. The Son of Man grew up in the quiet valley of existence—in shadow, not in sunshine, not *forced*. No unnatural, stimulating culture had developed the mind or feelings: no public flattery: no sunning of his infantine perfections in the glare of the world's show, had brought the temptation of the wilderness with which His manhood grappled, too early on His soul. We know that He was childlike, as other children: for in after years, His brethren thought His fame strange, and His townsmen rejected Him. They could not believe *that* one who had gone in and out, ate and drank and worked, was He whose Name is Wonderful. The proverb, true of others, was true of Him: "A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house." You know Him in a *picture* at once, by the halo round His brow. There was no glory in His real life to mark Him. He was in the world, and the world knew Him not. Gradually and gently He woke to consciousness of life and its manifold meaning; found Himself in possession of a self; by degrees opened His eyes upon this outer world, and drank in its beauty. Early He felt the lily of the field discourse to Him of the Invisible Loveliness, and the ravens tell of God His Father. Gradually and not at once, He embraced the sphere of human duties, and He woke to His earthly relationships one by one—the Son—the Brother—the Citizen—the Master.

It is a very deep and beautiful and precious truth that the Eternal Son had a human and progressive childhood. Happy the child who is suffered to be and content to be what God meant it to be—a child while childhood lasts. Happy the parent who does not force artificial manners—precocious feeling—premature religion. Our age is one of stimulus and high pressure. We live, as it were, our lives out fast. Effect is everything. Results produced at

168 Early Development of Jesus

once: something to show and something that may *tell*. The folio of patient years is replaced by the pamphlet that stirs men's curiosity to-day, and to-morrow is forgotten. "Plain living and high thinking are no more." The town, with its fever and its excitements, and its collision of mind with mind, has spread over the country: and there is no country, scarcely home. To men who traverse England in a few hours, and spend only a portion of the year in one place, Home is becoming a vocable of past ages.

The result is that heart and brain which were given to last for seventy years, wear out before their time. We have our exhausted men of twenty-five, and our old men of forty. Heart and brain give way: the heart hardens and the brain grows soft.

Brethren! the Son of God lived till thirty in an obscure village of Judea, unknown: then came forth a matured and perfect Man—with mind, and heart, and frame, in perfect balance of humanity. It is a Divine lesson! I would I could say as strongly as I feel deeply. Our stimulating artificial culture destroys depth. Our competition, our nights turned into days by pleasure, leave no time for earnestness. We are superficial men. Character in the world wants *root*. England has gained much: she has lost also much. The world wants what has passed away—and which until we secure, we shall remain the clever shallow men we are: a childhood and a youth spent in the shade—a Home.

Now this growth of Jesus took place in three particulars.

I. In spiritual strength. "The child waxed strong in spirit."

Spiritual strength consists of two things—power of Will, and power of Self-restraint. It requires two things, therefore, for its existence—strong feelings, and strong command over them.

Now it is here we make a great mistake: we mistake strong feelings for strong character. A man who bears all before him—before whose frown domestics tremble, and whose bursts of fury make the children of the house quake,

Early Development of Jesus 169

—because he has his will obeyed, and his own way in all things, we call him a strong man. The truth is, *that* is the weak man : it is his passions that are strong : he, mastered by them, is weak. You must measure the strength of a man by the power of the feelings which he subdues, not by the power of those which subdue him.

And hence, composure is very often the highest result of strength. Did we never see a man receive a flagrant insult, and only grow a little pale, and then reply quietly? That was a man spiritually strong. Or did we never see a man in anguish, stand as if carved out of solid rock, mastering himself? or one bearing a hopeless daily trial, remain silent, and never tell the world what it was that cankered his home-peace? That is strength. He who with strong passions remains chaste : he who keenly sensitive, with manly power of indignation in him, can be provoked, and yet refrain himself, and forgive—these are strong men, spiritual heroes.

The Child *waxed* strong—spiritual strength is reached by successive steps. Fresh strength is got by every mastery of self. It is the belief of the savage, that the spirit of every enemy he slays enters into him and becomes added to his own, accumulating a warrior's strength for the day of battle : therefore he slays all he can. It is true in the spiritual warfare. Every sin you slay—the spirit of that sin passes into you transformed into strength : every passion, not merely kept in abeyance by asceticism, but subdued by a higher impulse, is so much character strengthened. The strength of the passion not expended is yours still. Understand, then, you are not a man of spiritual power because your impulses are irresistible. They sweep over your soul like a tornado—lay all flat before them ; whereupon you feel a secret pride of strength. Last week men saw a vessel on this coast borne headlong on the breakers, and dashing itself with terrific force against the shore. It embedded itself, a miserable wreck, deep in sand and shingle. Was that brig in her convulsive throes strong? or was it powerless and helpless?

No, my brethren : God's spirit in the soul—an inward

170 Early Development of Jesus

power of doing the thing we will and ought—that is strength, nothing else. All other force in us is only our weakness, the violence of driving Passion. “I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me:” this is Christian strength. “I cannot do the things I would:” that is the weakness of an unredeemed slave.

I instance one single evidence of strength in the early years of Jesus: I find it in that calm, long waiting of thirty years before He began His Work. And yet all the evils He was to redress were there, provoking indignation, crying for interference—the hollowness of social life—the misinterpretations of Scripture—the forms of worship and phraseology which had hidden moral truth—the injustice—the priestcraft—the cowardice—the hypocrisies: He had long seen them all.

All those years His soul burned within Him with a Divine zeal and heavenly indignation. A mere *man*—a weak, emotional man of spasmodic feeling—a hot enthusiast, would have spoken out at once, and at once been crushed. The Everlasting Word incarnate bided His own time: “Mine hour is not yet come”—matured His energies—condensed them by repression—and then went forth to speak and do and suffer. His hour was come. This is strength: the power of a Divine Silence: the strong will to keep force till it is wanted: the power to wait God’s time. “He that believeth,” said the wise prophet, “shall not make haste.”

II. Growth in wisdom—“filled with wisdom.”

Let us distinguish wisdom from two things. From information first. It is one thing to be well-informed, it is another thing to be wise. Many books read, innumerable facts hived up in a capacious memory, this does not constitute wisdom. Books give it not: sometimes the bitterest experience gives it not. Many a heart-break may have come as the result of life-errors and life-mistakes; and yet men may be no wiser than before. Before the same temptations they fall again in the self-same way they fell before. Where they erred in youth they err still in age. A mournful

Early Development of Jesus 171

truth! "Ever learning," said St. Paul, "and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth."

Distinguish wisdom again, from talent. Brilliancy of powers is not the wisdom for which Solomon prayed. Wisdom is of the heart rather than the intellect: the harvest of moral thoughtfulness, patiently reaped in through years. Two things are required—Earnestness and Love. First that rare thing Earnestness—the earnestness which looks on life practically. Some of the wisest of the race have been men who have scarcely stirred beyond home, read little, felt and thought much. "Give me," said Solomon, "a wise and understanding heart." A heart which ponders upon life, trying to understand its mystery, not in order to talk about it like an orator, nor in order to theorize about it like a philosopher; but in order to know how to *live* and how to die.

And besides this, love is required for wisdom—the love which opens the heart and makes it generous, and reveals secrets deeper than prudence or political economy teaches—*e.g.* "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Prudence did not calculate that, love revealed it. No man can be wise without love. Prudent: cunning: Yes; but not wise. Whoever has closed his heart to love has got wisdom at one entrance quite shut out. A large, genial, loving heart, with that we have known a ploughman wise; without it we know a hundred men of statesman-like sagacity fools, profound, but not wise. There was a man who pulled down his barns and built greater, a most sagacious man, getting on in life, acquiring, amassing, and all for self. The men of that generation called him, no doubt, wise—God said, "Thou fool."

Speaking humanly, the steps by which the wisdom of Jesus was acquired were two.

1. The habit of inquiry.—2. The collision of mind with other minds. Both these we find in this anecdote: His parents found Him with the doctors in the Temple, both hearing and asking them questions. For the mind of man left to itself is unproductive: alone in the wild woods he

172 Early Development of Jesus

becomes a savage. Taken away from school early, and sent to the plough, the country boy loses by degrees that which distinguishes him from the cattle, that he drives, and over his very features and looks the low animal expressions creep. Mind is necessary for mind. The Mediatorial system extends through all God's dealings with us. The higher man is the mediator between God and the lower man: only through man can man receive development. For these reasons, we call this event at Jerusalem a crisis or turning point in the history of Him who was truly Man.

He had come from Nazareth's quiet valley and green slopes on the hillsides, where hill and valley, and cloud and wind, and day and night, had nourished His child's heart—from communion with minds proverbially low, for the adage was, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?"—to the capital of His country, to converse with the highest and most cultivated intellects. He had many a question to ask, and many a difficulty to solve. As for instance, such as this: How could the religion accredited in Jerusalem—a religion of long prayers and church services, and phylacteries, and rigorous sabbaths—be reconciled with the stern, manly righteousness of which He had read in the old prophets: a righteousness not of liany-makers, but of men with swords in their hands and zeal in their hearts, setting up God's kingdom upon earth? a kingdom of Truth, and Justice, and Realities—were they bringing in that kingdom?—And if not, who should? Such questions had to be felt, and asked, and pondered on. Thenceforth we say therefore, in all reverence, dated the intellectual life of Jesus. From that time "Jesus increased in *wisdom*."

Not that they, the doctors of the Temple, contributed much. Those ecclesiastical pedants had not much to tell Him that was worth the telling. They were thinking about theology, He about Religion. They about rubrics and church services, He about God His Father, and His Will. And yet He gained more from them than they from Him. Have we never observed that the deepest revelations of ourselves are often made to us by trifling remarks met with here and

Early Development of Jesus 173

there in conversation and books, sparks which set a whole train of thoughts on fire? Nay, that a false view given by an inferior mind has led us to a true one, and that conversations from which we had expected much light, turning out unsatisfactorily, have thrown us upon ourselves and God, and so become almost the birth-times of the soul? The truth is, it is not the amount which is poured in that gives wisdom; but the amount of creative mind and heart working on and stirred by what is so poured in. That conversation with miserable priests and formalists called into activity the One Creative Mind which was to fertilize the whole spiritual life of man to the end of time; and Jesus grew in wisdom by a conversation with pedants of the law.

What Jerusalem was to Him a town life is to us. Knowledge develops itself in the heated atmosphere of town life. Where men meet, and thought clashes with thought—where workmen sit round a board at work, intellectual irritability must be stirred more than where men live and work alone. The march of mind, as they call it, must go on. Whatever evils there may be in our excited, feverish, modern life, it is quite certain that we know through it more than our forefathers knew. The workman knows more of foreign politics than most statesmen knew two centuries ago. The child is versed in theological questions which only occupied master minds once. But the question is, whether, like the Divine Child in the Temple, we are turning knowledge into wisdom, and whether, understanding more of the mysteries of life, we are feeling more of its sacred law; and whether, having left behind the priests, and the scribes, and the doctors, and the Fathers, we are about our Father's business, and becoming wise to God.

III. Growth in grace—"the grace of God was upon Him." And this in three points:

1. The exchange of an earthly for a heavenly home.
2. Of an earthly for a heavenly parent.
3. The reconciliation of domestic duties.

First step: Exchange of an earthly for a heavenly home.

174 Early Development of Jesus

Jesus was in the Temple for the first time. That which was dull routine to others through dead habit, was full of vivid impression, fresh life, and God, to Him. "My Father's business"—"My Father's house." How different the meaning of these expressions now from what it had been before! Before all was limited to the cottage of the carpenter: now it extended to the Temple. He had felt the sanctities of a new home. In after-life the phrase which He had learned by earthly experience obtained a Divine significance. "In my Father's house are many mansions."

Our first life is spontaneous and instinctive. Our second life is reflective. There is a moment when the life spontaneous passes into the life reflective. We live at first by instinct; then we look in—feel ourselves—ask what we are and whence we came, and whither we are bound. In an awful new world of mystery, and destinies, and duties—we feel God, and know that our true home is our Father's house which has many mansions.

Those are fearful, solitary moments; in which the heart knoweth its own bitterness, and a stranger intermeddled not with its joys. Father—mother—cannot share these; and to share is to intrude. The soul first meets God alone. So with Jacob when he saw the dream-ladder: so with Samuel when the Voice called him: so with Christ. So with every son of man, God visits the soul in secrecy, in silence, and in solitariness. And the danger and duty of a teacher is twofold. 1st, To avoid hastening that feeling, hurrying that crisis-moment which some call conversion, 2d, To avoid crushing it. I have said that first religion is a kind of instinct; and if a child does not exhibit strong religious sensibilities, if he seem "heedless, untouched by awe or serious thought," still it is wiser not to interfere. He may be still at home with God: he may be worshipping at home; as has been said with not less truth than beauty, he may be

Lying in Abraham's bosom all the year,
And worship—at the Temple's inner shrine,

God being with him when he knew it not. Very mysterious,

Early Development of Jesus 175

and beautiful, and wonderful is God's communing with the unconscious soul before reflection comes. The second caution is not to quench the feeling. Joseph and the Virgin chid the Child for His absence : "Why hast Thou dealt so with us?" They could not understand His altered ways : His neglect of apparent duties : His indifference to usual pursuits. They mourned over the change. And this reminds us of the way in which Affection's voice itself ministers to ruin. When God comes to the heart, and His presence is shown by thoughtfulness, and seriousness, and distaste to common business, and loneliness, and solitary musings, and a certain tone of melancholy, straightway we set ourselves to expostulate, to rebuke, to cheer, to prescribe amusement and gaieties, as the cure for seriousness which seems out of place. Some of us have seen that tried ; and more fearful still, seen it succeed. And we have seen the spirit of frivolity and thoughtlessness, which had been banished for a time, come back again with seven spirits of evil more mighty than himself, and the last state of that person worse than the first. And we have watched the still small voice of God in the soul silenced. And we have seen the spirit of the world get its victim back again ; and incipient Goodness dried up like morning dew upon the heart. And they that loved him did it—his parents—his teachers. They quenched the smoking flax, and turned out the lamp of God lighted in the soul !

The last step was, reconciliation to domestic duties. He went down to Nazareth, and was subject unto them. The first step in spirituality is to get a distaste for common duties. There is a time when creeds, ceremonies, services, are distasteful ; when the conventional arrangements of society are intolerable burdens ; and when, aspiring with a sense of vague longing after a goodness which shall be immeasurable, a duty which shall transcend mere law, a something which we cannot put in words—all restraints of rule and habit gall the spirit. But the last and highest step in spirituality is made in feeling these common duties again to be divine and holy. This is the true liberty of Christ,

176 The Sympathy of Christ

when a free man binds himself in love to duty. Not in shrinking from our distasteful occupations, but in fulfilling them, do we realize our high origin. And this is the blessed, second childhood of Christian life. All the several stages towards it seem to be shadowed forth with accurate truthfulness in the narrative of the Messiah's infancy. First the quiet, unpretending, unconscious obedience and innocence of home. Then the crisis of inquiry : new strange thoughts, entrance upon a new world, hopeless seeking of truth from those who cannot teach it, hearing many teachers and questioning all : thence bewilderment and bitterness, loss of relish for former duties : and small consolation to a man in knowing that he is farther off from heaven than when he was a boy. And then, lastly, the true reconciliation and atonement of our souls to God—a second springtide of life—a second Faith deeper than that of childhood—not instinctive but conscious trust—childlike love come back again—childlike wonder—childlike implicitness of obedience—only deeper than childhood ever knew. When life has got a new meaning, when “old things are passed away, and all things are become new ;” when earth has become irradiate with the feeling of our Father's business and our Father's Home.

THE SYMPATHY OF CHRIST

HEBREWS iv. 15, 16.—“For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities ; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”

ACCORDING to these verses, the Priesthood of Jesus Christ is based upon the perfection of His humanity. Because tempted in all points like as we are, therefore He can show mercy, and grant help. Whatever destroys the conception of His humanity, does in that same degree overthrow the notion of His priesthood.

Our subject is the Priestly Sympathies of Christ. But we make three preliminary observations.

The perfection of Christ's humanity implies that He was possessed of a human soul as well as a human body. There was a view, held in early times, and condemned by the Church as a heresy, according to which the body of Christ was an external framework animated by Deity, as our bodies are animated by our souls. What the soul is to us, Deity was to Christ. His body was flesh, blood, bones,—moved, guided, ruled by indwelling Divinity.

But you perceive at once that this destroys the notion of complete humanity. It is not this tabernacle of material elements which constitutes our humanity: you cannot take that pale corpse from which life has fled, and call that Man. And if Deity were to take up that form and make it its abode, that would not be an union of the Divine and Human. It would only be the union of Deity with certain materials that might have passed into man, or into an animal, or a herb. Humanity implies a body and a soul.

Accordingly, in the life of Christ we find two distinct classes of feeling. When He hungered in the wilderness—when He thirsted on the cross—when He was weary by the well at Sychar,—He experienced sensations which belong to the bodily department of human nature. But when out of twelve He selected one to be His bosom friend, when He looked round upon the crowd in anger, when the tears streamed down His cheeks at Bethany, and when He recoiled from the thought of approaching dissolution, these were not the sensations of the body: grief, friendship, fear—much less were they the attributes of Godhead. They were the affections of an acutely sensitive human soul, alive to all the tenderness, and hopes, and anguish with which human life is filled, qualifying Him to be tempted *in all* points like as we are.

The second thought which presents itself is, that the Redeemer not only was but *is* man. He *was* tempted in all points like us. He *is* a high priest which can be touched. Our conceptions on this subject, from being vague, are often

178 The Sympathy of Christ

very erroneous. It is fancied that in the history of Jesus' existence, once, for a limited period and for definite purposes, He took part in frail humanity ; but that when that purpose was accomplished, the Man for ever perished, and the Spirit reascended, to unite again with pure unmixed Deity. But Scripture has taken peculiar pains to give assurance of the continuance of His humanity. It has carefully recorded His resurrection. After that He passed through space, from spot to spot : when He was in one place He was not in another. His body was sustained by the ordinary aliments : broiled fish and honeycomb. The prints of suffering were on Him. His recognitions were human still. Thomas and Peter were especially reminded of incidents before His death, and connected with His living interests. To Thomas—"Reach hither thy hand." To Peter—"Lovest thou me?"

And this typifies to us a very grand and important truth. It is this, if I may venture so to express myself—the truth of the Human Heart of God. We think of God as a Spirit, infinitely removed from and unlike the creatures He has made. But the truth is, man resembles God :—all spirits, all minds are of the same family. The Father bears a likeness to the Son whom He has created. The mind of God is similar to the mind of man. Love does not mean one thing in man, and another thing in God. Holiness, Justice, Pity, Tenderness—these are in the Eternal the same in kind which they are in the Finite Being. The present Manhood of Christ conveys this deeply important truth, that the Divine Heart is human in its sympathies.

The third observation upon these verses is, that there is a connexion between what Jesus was and what Jesus is. He can be touched now, *because* He was tempted then. The incidents and the feelings of that part of the existence which is gone have not passed away without results which are deeply entwined with His present being. His past experience has left certain effects durable in His nature as it is now. It has endued Him with certain qualifications

and certain susceptibilities, which He would not have had but for that experience. Just as the results remained upon His body, the prints of the nails in His palms, and the spear-gash in His side, so do the results remain upon His soul, enduing Him with a certain susceptibility, for He can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities: with certain qualifications, for He is able to show mercy, and to impart grace to help in time of need.

To turn now to the subject itself. It has two branches.

- I. The Redeemer's preparation for His priesthood.
- II. The Redeemer's priestly qualifications.

I. His preparation.

The preparation consisted in being tempted. But here a difficulty arises. Temptation, as applied to a Being perfectly free from tendencies to evil, is not easy to understand. See what the difficulty is. Temptation has two senses: It means test or probation: it means also trial, involving the idea of pain or danger. A common acid applied to gold, tests it, but there is no risk or danger to the most delicate golden ornament. There is one acid, and only one, which tries it, as well as tests it. The same acid applied to a shell endangers the delicacy of its surface. A weight hung from a bar of iron only tests its strength; the same, depending from a human arm, is a trial, involving it may be the risk of pain or fracture. Now trial placed before a sinless being is intelligible enough in the sense of probation: it is a test of excellence: but it is not easy to see how it can be temptation in the sense of pain, if there be no inclination to do wrong.

However, Scripture plainly asserts this as the character of Christ's temptation. Not merely test, but trial.

First, you have passages declaring the immaculate nature of His mind; as here, "without sin." Again, He was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners." And again, "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me." The spirit of evil found nothing which it could

180 The Sympathy of Christ

claim as its own in Christ. It was the meeting of two elements which will not amalgamate. Oil and water could as easily blend, as the Mind of Christ with evil. Temptation glanced from His heart as the steel point does from the surface of the diamond. It was not that evil propensities were kept under by the power of the spirit in Him:—He had no evil propensities at all. Obedience was natural to Him.

But then we find another class of passages, such as this: “He *suffered*, being tempted.” There was not merely test in the temptation, but there was also painfulness in the victory. How could this be without any tendency to evil?

To answer this, let us not analyze sin. In every act of sin there are two distinct steps: There is the rising of a desire which is natural, and being natural, is not wrong:—there is the indulgence of that desire in forbidden circumstances; and that is sin. Let injury, for example, be inflicted, and resentment will arise. It must arise spontaneously. It is as impossible for injustice to be done, and resentment not to follow, as it is for the flesh not to quiver on the application of intense torture. Resentment is but the sense of injustice, made more vivid by its being brought home to ourselves:—resentment is beyond our control, so far. There is no sin in this: but let resentment rest there; let it pass into, not justice, but revenge—let it smoulder in vindictive feeling till it becomes retaliation, and then a natural feeling has grown into a transgression. You have the distinction between these two things clearly marked in Scripture. “Be ye angry”—here is the allowance for the human, “and sin not.”—here is the point where resentment passes into retaliation.

Take, again, the natural sensation of hunger. Let a man have been without food: let the gratification present itself, and the natural desire will arise involuntarily. It will arise just as certainly in a forbidden as in a permitted circumstance. It will arise whether what he looks on be the bread of another or his own. And it is not here, in the

sensation of hunger, that the guilt lies. But it lies in the wilful gratification of it after it is known to be forbidden.

This was literally one of the cases in which Christ was tried. The wish for food was in His nature in the wilderness. The very mode of gratifying it was presented to His imagination: by using Divine power in an unlawful way. And had He so been constituted that the lower wish was superior to the higher will, there would have been an act of sin; had the two been nearly balanced, so that the conflict hung in doubt, there would have been a tendency to sin: what we call a sinful nature. But it was in the entire and perfect subjugation of desire to the will of Right that a sinless nature was exhibited.

Here, then, is the nature of sin. Sin is not the possession of desires; but the having them in uncontrolled ascendancy over the higher nature. Sinfulness does not consist in having *strong* desires or passions: in the strongest and highest natures, all, including the desires, is strong. Sin is not a real *thing*. It is rather the absence of a something, the will to do right. It is not a disease or taint, an actual substance projected into the constitution. It is the absence of the spirit which orders and harmonizes the whole; so that what we mean when we say the natural man must sin inevitably is this, that he has strong natural appetites, and that he has no bias from above to counteract those appetites: exactly as if a ship were deserted by her crew, and left on the bosom of the Atlantic with every sail set and the wind blowing. No one forces her to destruction—yet on the rocks she will surely go, just because there is no pilot at the helm. Such is the state of ordinary men. Temptation leads to fall. The gusts of instincts, which rightly guided, would have carried safely into port, dash them on the rocks. No one forces them to sin: but the spirit-pilot has left the helm.—Fallen Nature.

Sin therefore, is not in the appetites, but in the absence of a controlling Will.

Now contrast this state with the state of Christ. There were in Him all the natural appetites of mind and body.

182 The Sympathy of Christ

Relaxation and friendship were dear to Him—so were sunlight and life. Hunger—pain—death—He could feel all, and shrunk from them. Conceive then a case in which the gratification of any one of these inclinations was inconsistent with His Father's will. At one moment it was unlawful to eat, though hungry : and without one tendency to disobey, did fasting cease to be severe ? It was demanded that He should endure anguish ; and willingly as He subdued Himself, did pain cease to be pain ? Could the spirit of obedience reverse every feeling in human nature ? When the brave man gives his shattered arm to the surgeon's knife, will may prevent even the quiver of an eyelid ; but no will and no courage, can reverse his sensations, or prevent the operation from inflicting pain. When the heart is raw, and smarting from recent bereavement, let there be the deepest and most reverential submission to the Highest Will, is it possible not to wince ? Can any cant demand for submission, extort the profession that pain is pleasure ?

It seems to have been in this way that the temptation of Christ caused suffering. He suffered from the force of desire. Though there was no hesitation whether to obey or not, no strife in the will, in the act of mastery there was pain. There was self-denial :—there was obedience at the expense of tortured natural feeling. He shrunk from St. Peter's suggestion of escape from ignominy as from a thing which did not shake His determination, but made Him feel, in the idea of bright life, vividly the cost of His resolve. "Get thee behind Me, Tempter, for thou art an offence." In the garden, unswervingly : "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt." There was no reluctance in the *will*. But was there no struggling ? No shudder in the inward sensations ? No remembrance that the cross was sharp ? No recollection of the family at Bethany, and the pleasant walk, and the dear companionship which He was about to leave ? "My soul is exceeding sorrowful to die." . . .

So that in every one of these cases—not by the reluctancy of a sinful sensation, but by the quivering and the anguish of natural feeling when it is trampled upon by lofty will—

The Sympathy of Christ 183

Jesus *suffered*, being tempted. He was "tempted like as we are." Remember this. For the way in which some speak of the sinlessness of Jesus, reduces all His suffering to physical pain, destroys the reality of temptation, reduces that glorious heart to a pretence, and converts the whole of His history into a mere fictitious drama, in which scenes of trial were represented, not felt.

Remember that "in all points." the Redeemer's *soul* was tempted.

II. The second point we take is the Redeemer's Priesthood.

Priesthood is that office by which He is the medium of union between man and God. The capacity for this has been indelibly engraven on His nature by His experience here. All this capacity is based on His sympathy:—He can be "touched with the feeling of our infirmities."

Till we have reflected on it, we are scarcely aware how much the sum of human happiness in the world is indebted to this one feeling—sympathy. We get cheerfulness and vigour, we scarcely know how or when, from mere association with our fellow-men; and from the looks reflected on us of gladness and employment, we catch inspiration and power to go on, from human presence and from cheerful looks. The workman works with added energy from having others by. The full family circle has a strength and a life peculiarly its own. The substantial good and the effectual relief which men extend to one another is trifling. It is not by these, but by something far less costly, that the work is done. God has ensured it by a much more simple machinery. He has given to the weakest and the poorest power to contribute largely to the common stock of gladness. The child's smile and laugh are mighty powers in this world. When bereavement has left you desolate, what substantial benefit is there which makes condolence acceptable? It cannot replace the loved ones you have lost. It can bestow upon you nothing permanent. But a warm hand has touched yours, and its thrill told you that there was a living

184 The Sympathy of Christ

response there to your emotion. One look—one human sigh has done more for you than the costliest present could convey.

And it is for want of remarking this, that the effect of public charity falls often so far short of the expectations of those who give. The springs of men's generosity are dried up by hearing of the repining, and the envy, and the discontent which have been sown by the general collection and the provision establishment, among cottages where all was harmony before. The famine and the pestilence are met by abundant liberality: and the apparent return for this is riot and sedition. But the secret lies all in this. It is not in channels such as these that the heart's gratitude can flow. Love is not bought by money, but by love. There has been all the machinery of a public distribution: but there has been no exhibition of individual, personal interest. The rich man who goes to his poor brother's cottage, and without affectation of humility, naturally and with the respect which man owes to man, enters into his circumstances, inquiring about his distresses, and hears his homely tale, has done more to establish an interchange of kindly feeling than he could have secured by the costliest present, by itself. Public donations have their value and their uses. Poor-laws keep human beings from starvation; but in the point of eliciting gratitude, all these fail. Man has not been brought into contact close enough with man for this. They do not work by sympathy.

Again, when the electric touch of sympathetic feeling has gone among a mass of men, it communicates itself, and is reflected back from every individual in the crowd, with a force exactly proportioned to their numbers. The speech or sermon read before the limited circle of a family, and the same discourse uttered before closely crowded hundreds, are two different things. There is strange power even in the mere presence of a common crowd, exciting almost uncontrollable emotion.

It is on record, that the hard heart of an oriental conqueror was unmanned by the sight of a dense mass of living

millions engaged in one enterprise. He accounted for it by saying, that it suggested to him that within a single century not one of those millions would be alive. But the hard-hearted bosom of the tyrant mistook its own emotions: his tears came from no such far-fetched inference of reflection: they rose spontaneously, as they will rise in a dense crowd, you cannot tell why. It is the thrilling thought of numbers engaged in the same object. It is the idea of our own feelings reciprocated back to us, and reflected from many hearts. It is the mighty presence of Life.

And again, it seems partly to avail itself of this tendency within us, that such stress is laid on the injunction of united prayer. Private devotion is essential to the spiritual life—without it there is no life. But it cannot replace united prayer: for the two things have different aims. Solitary prayer is feeble in comparison with that which rises before the throne echoed by the hearts of hundreds, and strengthened by the feeling that other aspirations are mingling with our own. And whether it be the chanted litany, or the more simply read service, or the anthem producing one emotion at the same moment in many bosoms, the value and the power of public prayer seem chiefly to depend on this mysterious affection of our nature—Sympathy.

And now, having endeavoured to illustrate this power of sympathy, it is for us to remember that of this in its fulness He is susceptible. There is a vague way of speaking of the Atonement which does not realize the tender, affectionate, personal love, by which that daily, hourly reconciliation is effected. The sympathy of Christ was not merely love of men in masses: He loved the masses, but he loved them because made up of individuals. He “had compassion on the multitude;” but He had also discriminating, special tenderness for erring Peter and erring Thomas. He felt for the despised lonely Zaccheus in his sycamore-tree. He compassionated the discomfort of His disciples. He mixed His tears with the stifled sobs by the grave of Lazarus. He called the abashed children to His side. Amongst the numbers, as He walked, He detected the individual touch

of faith. "Master, the multitude throng Thee, and sayest Thou, *Who touched Me?*"—"Somebody hath touched Me."

Observe, how He is *touched* by our infirmities—with a separate, special, discriminating love. There is not a single throb, in a single human bosom, that does not thrill at once with more than electric speed up to the mighty Heart of God. *You* have not shed a tear or sighed a sigh, that did not come back to you exalted and purified by having passed through the Eternal bosom.

The priestly powers conveyed by this faculty of sympathizing, according to the text, are two—The power of mercy : and the power of having grace to help. "Therefore"—because He can be touched—"let us come boldly," expecting mercy—and grace.

1. We may boldly expect mercy from Him who has learned to sympathize. He learned sympathy by being tempted : but it is by being tempted, *yet without sin*, that He is specially able to show mercy.

There are two who are unfit for showing mercy :—He who has never been tried ; and he who, having been tempted, has fallen under temptation. The young, unttempted, and upright, are often severe judges. They are for sanguinary punishment : they are for expelling offenders from the bosom of society. The old, on the contrary, who have fallen much, are lenient : but it is a leniency which often talks thus : Men must be men—a young man must sow his wild oats and reform.

So young ardent Saul, untried by doubt, persecuted the Christians with severity ; and Saul the King, on the contrary, having fallen himself, weakly permitted Agag to escape punishment. David, again, when his own sin was narrated to him under another name, was unrelenting in his indignation : "The man that hath done this thing shall surely die."

None of these were qualified for showing mercy aright. Now this qualification "*without sin*," is very remarkable : for it is the one, we often least should think of. Unthinkingly we should say that to have erred would make a man lenient :—it is not so.

The Sympathy of Christ 187

That truth is taught with deep significance in one of the incidents of the Redeemer's life. There stood in His presence a tempted woman, covered with the confusion of recent conviction. And there stood beside her the sanctimonious religionists of that day, waiting like hell-hounds to be let loose upon their prey. Calm words came from the lips of Him "who spake as man never spake," and whose heart felt as man never felt. "He that is without sin among you let him first cast a stone." A memorable lesson of eternal truth. Sinners are not fit to judge of sin:—their justice is revenge—their mercy is feebleness. He alone can judge of sin—he alone can attemper the sense of what is due to the offended Law with the remembrance of that which is due to human frailty—he alone is fit for showing manly mercy, who has, like his Master, felt the power of temptation in its might, and come scathless through the trial.

"In all points tempted—*yet without sin* ;" therefore, to Him you may "boldly go to find mercy."

2. The other priestly power is the grace of showing "help in time of need."

We must not make too much of sympathy, as mere feeling.* We do in things spiritual as we do with hothouse plants. The feeble exotic, beautiful to look at, but useless, has costly sums spent on it. The hardy oak, a nation's strength, is permitted to grow, scarcely observed, in the fence and copses. We prize feeling and praise its possessor. But feeling is only a sickly exotic in itself—a passive quality, having in it nothing moral, no temptation and no victory. A man is no more a good man for having feeling, than he is for having a delicate ear for music, or a far-seeing optic nerve. The Son of man had feeling—He could be "touched."—The tear would start from His eyes at the sight of human sorrow. But it was no exotic in His soul, that sympathy, beautiful to look at, too delicate for use. Feeling with Him led to this, "He went about doing good." Sympathy with Him was this, "Grace to help in time of need."

And this is the blessing of the thought of Divine sympathy. By the sympathy of man, after all, the wound is

188 The Sympathy of Christ

not healed ; it is only stanchèd for a time. It can make the tear flow less bitterly : it cannot dry it up. So far as permanent good goes, who has not felt the deep truth which Job taught his friends—" Miserable comforters are ye all " ?

The sympathy of the Divine Human ! He knows what strength is needed. He gives grace to help ; and when the world, with its thousand forms of temptation, seems to whisper to us as to Esau, Sell me thy birthright, the other voice speaks, Shall I barter blessedness for happiness ? the inward peace for the outward thrill ? the benediction of my Father for a mess of pottage ? There are moments when we seem to tread above this earth, superior to its allurements, able to do without its kindness, firmly bracing ourselves to do our work as He did His. Those moments are not the sunshine of life. They did not come when the world would have said that all round you was glad : but it was when outward trials had shaken the soul to its very centre, then there came from Him . . . " Grace to help in time of need."

From this subject, I draw, in concluding, two inferences.

1. He who would sympathize must be content to be tried and tempted. There is a hard and boisterous rudeness in our hearts by nature which requires to be softened down. We pass by suffering gaily, carelessly, not in cruelty, but unfeelingly, just because we do not know what suffering is. We wound men by our looks and our abrupt expressions without intending it, because we have not been taught the delicacy, and the tact, and the gentleness which can only be learnt by the wounding of our own sensibilities. There is a haughty feeling in uprightness which has never been on the verge of fall, that requires humbling. There is an inability to enter into difficulties of thought, which marks the mind to which all things have been presented superficially, and which has never experienced the horror of feeling the ice of doubt crashing beneath the feet.

Therefore, if you aspire to be a son of consolation—if you would partake of the priestly gift of sympathy—if you would pour something beyond common-place consolation into a tempted heart—if you would pass through the intercourse of

daily life, with the delicate tact which never inflicts pain—if to that most acute of human ailments, mental doubt, you are ever to give effectual succour, you must be content to pay the price of the costly education. Like Him, you must suffer—being tempted.

But remember, it is being tempted in all points, *yet without* sin, that makes sympathy real, manly, perfect, instead of a mere sentimental tenderness. Sin will teach you to *feel* for trials. It will not enable you to judge them; to be merciful to them—nor to help them in time of need with any certainty.

(See the remarks on St. Peter's case in the notes of the afternoon Sermon.)

Lastly, it is this same human sympathy which qualifies Christ for judgment. It is written that the Father hath committed all judgment to Him, *because* He is the Son of Man. The sympathy of Christ extends to the frailties of human nature; not to its hardened guilt: He is "touched with the feeling of our *infirmities*." There is nothing in His bosom which can harmonize with malice—He cannot feel for envy—He has no fellow-feeling for cruelty: oppression: hypocrisy; bitter censorious judgments. Remember, He could look round about Him with anger. The sympathy of Christ is a comforting subject. It is, besides, a tremendous subject: for on sympathy the awards of heaven and hell are built. "Except a man be born again"—not he shall not, but—"he cannot enter into heaven." There is nothing in him which has affinity to anything in the Judge's bosom. A sympathy for that which is pure implies a repulsion of that which is impure. Hatred of evil is in proportion to the strength of love for good. To love intensely good, is to hate evil intensely. It was in strict accordance with the laws of sympathy that He blighted Pharisaism in such ungentle words as these: "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers! how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" Win the mind of Christ now—or else His sympathy for human nature will not save you from, but only ensure, the recoil of abhorrence at the last—"Depart from Me! I never knew you." •

THE LONELINESS OF CHRIST

JOHN xvi. 31, 32.—“Jesus answered them, Do ye now believe? Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.”

THERE are two kinds of solitude: the first consisting of insulation in space, the other of isolation of the spirit. The first is simply separation by distance. When we are seen, touched, heard by none, we are said to be alone. And all hearts respond to the truth of that saying, This is not solitude: for sympathy can people our solitude with a crowd. The fisherman on the ocean alone at night is not alone when he remembers the earnest longings which are arising up to heaven at home for his safety—The traveller is not alone when the faces which will greet him on his arrival seem to beam upon him as he trudges on—The solitary student is not alone when he feels that human hearts will respond to the truths which he is preparing to address to them.

The other is loneliness of soul. There are times when hands touch ours, but only send an icy chill of unsympathizing indifference to the heart: when eyes gaze into ours, but with a glazed look which cannot read into the bottom of our souls: when words pass from our lips, but only come back as an echo reverberated without reply through a dreary solitude: when the multitude throng and press us, and we cannot say, as Christ said, “Somebody hath *touched* me:” for the contact has been not between soul and soul, but only between form and form.

And there are two kinds of men who feel this last solitude in different ways. The first are the men of self-reliance; self-dependent: who ask no counsel, and crave no sympathy: who act and resolve alone—who can go sternly through duty, and scarcely shrink let what will be crushed

in them. Such men command respect : for whoever respects himself, constrains the reverence of others. They are invaluable in all those professions of life in which sensitive feeling would be a superfluity ; they make iron commanders : surgeons who do not shrink ; and statesmen who do not flinch from their purpose for the dread of unpopularity. But mere self-dependence is weakness : and the conflict is terrible when a human sense of weakness is felt by such men. Jacob was alone when he slept in his way to Padan Aram, the first night that he was away from his father's roof, with the world before him, and all the old associations broken up—and Elijah was alone in the wilderness when the court had deserted him, and he said, "They have digged down Thine altars, and slain Thy prophets with the sword : and I, even I, only am left, and they seek my life to take it away." But the loneliness of the tender Jacob was very different from that of the stern Elijah. To Jacob the sympathy he yearned for was realized in the form of a simple dream. A ladder raised from earth to heaven figured the possibility of communion between the spirit of man and the Spirit of God. In Elijah's case, the storm, and the earthquake, and the fire, did their convulsing work in the soul, before a still, small voice told him that he was not alone. In such a spirit the sense of weakness comes with a burst of agony, and the dreadful conviction of being alone manifests itself with a rending of the heart of rock. It is only so that such souls can be taught that the Father is with them, and that they are not alone.

There is another class of men who live in sympathy. These are affectionate minds which tremble at the thought of being alone : not from want of courage, nor from weakness of intellect comes their dependence upon others, but from the intensity of their affections. It is the trembling spirit of humanity in them. They want not aid, nor even countenance : but only sympathy. And the trial comes to them not in the shape of fierce struggle, but of chill and utter loneliness, when they are called upon to perform a duty on which the world looks coldly, or to embrace a truth

192 The Loneliness of Christ

which has not found lodgement yet in the breasts of others.

It is to this latter and not to the former class that we must look if we would understand the spirit in which the words of the text were pronounced. The deep Humanity of the Soul of Christ was gifted with those finer sensibilities of affectionate nature which stand in need of sympathy. He not only gave sympathy, but wanted it, too, from others. He who selected the gentle John to be His friend—who found solace in female sympathy, attended by the women who ministered to Him out of their substance—who in the Trial hour could not bear even to pray without the human presence, which is the pledge and reminder of God's presence, had nothing in Him of the hard, merely self-dependent character. Even this verse testifies to the same fact. A stern spirit never could have said, "I am not alone: the Father is with Me"—never would have felt the loneliness which needed the balancing truth. These words tell of a struggle: an inward reasoning: a difficulty and a reply: a sense of solitude—"I shall be alone;" and an immediate correction of that, "not alone—the Father is with Me."

There is no thought connected with the Life of Christ more touching, none that seems so peculiarly to characterize His spirit, than the solitariness in which He lived. Those who understood Him best only understood Him half. Those who knew Him best scarcely could be said to know Him. On this occasion the disciples thought—Now we do understand—now we believe. The lonely spirit answered, "*Do ye now believe? Behold the hour cometh that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave Me alone.*"

Very impressive is that trait in His history. He was in this world alone.

- I. First, then, we meditate on the Loneliness of Christ.
- II. On the temper of His solitude.

1. The Loneliness of Christ was caused by the Divine

The Loneliness of Christ 193

elevation of His character. His infinite superiority severed Him from sympathy—His exquisite affectionateness made that want of sympathy a keen trial.

There is a second-rate greatness which the world can comprehend. If we take two who are brought into direct contrast by Christ Himself, the one the type of human, the other that of Divine excellence, the Son of Man and John the Baptist, this becomes clearly manifest. John's life had a certain rude, rugged goodness, on which was written, in characters which required no magnifying-glass to read, spiritual excellence. The world on the whole accepted him. Pharisees and Sadducees went to his baptism. The people idolized him as a prophet; and if he had not chanced to cross the path of a weak prince and a revengeful woman, we can see no reason why John might not have finished his course with joy, recognised as irreproachable. If we inquire why it was that the world accepted John and rejected Christ, one reply appears to be, that the life of the one was finitely simple and one-sided, that of the Other divinely complex. In physical nature, the naturalist finds no difficulty in comprehending the simple structure of the lowest organizations of animal life, where one uniform texture, and one organ performing the office of brain and heart and lungs, at once leave little to perplex. But when he comes to study the complex anatomy of man, he has the labour of a lifetime before him. It is not difficult to master the constitution of a single country; but when you try to understand the universe, you find infinite appearances of contradiction: law opposed by law: motion balanced by motion: happiness blended with misery: and the power to elicit a divine order and unity out of this complex variety is given to only a few of the gifted of the race. That which the structure of man is to the structure of the limpet: that which the universe is to a single country, the complex and boundless soul of Christ was to the souls of other men.

Therefore to the superficial observer His life was a mass

194 ' The Loneliness of Christ

of inconsistencies and contradictions. All thought themselves qualified to point out the discrepancies. The Pharisees could not comprehend how a holy Teacher could eat with publicans and sinners. His own brethren could not reconcile His assumption of a public office with the privacy which He aimed at keeping. "If Thou doest these things, show Thyself to the world." Some thought He was "a good man,"—others said, "Nay—but He deceiveth the people." And hence it was that He lived to see all that acceptance which had marked the earlier stage of His career, as for instance at Capernaum, melt away. First the Pharisees took the alarm: then the Sadducees: then the political party of the Herodians: then the people. That was the most terrible of all: for the enmity of the upper classes is impotent; but when that cry of brute force is stirred from the depths of society, as deaf to the voice of reason as the ocean in its strength churned into raving foam by the winds, the heart of mere earthly oak quails before that. The apostles at all events did quail. One denied: another betrayed: all deserted. They "were scattered, each to his own:" and the Truth Himself was left alone in Pilate's judgment-hall.

Now learn from this a very important distinction. To feel solitary is no uncommon thing. To complain of being alone, without sympathy and misunderstood, is general enough. In every place, in many a family, these victims of diseased sensibility are to be found, and they might find a weakening satisfaction in observing a parallel between their own feelings and those of Jesus. But before that parallel is assumed, be very sure that it is, as in His case, the elevation of your character which severs you from your species. The world has small sympathy for Divine goodness: but it also has little for a great many other qualities which are disagreeable to it. You meet with no response—you are passed by—find yourself unpopular—meet with little communion.—Well? Is that because you are above the world, nobler, devising and executing grand plans which they cannot com-

The Loneliness of Christ 195

prehend : vindicating the wronged, proclaiming and living on great principles : offending it by the saintliness of your purity, and the unworldliness of your aspirations? Then yours is the Loneliness of Christ. Or is it that you are wrapped up in self—cold, disobliging, sentimental, indifferent about the welfare of others, and very much astonished that they are not deeply interested in you? *You* must not use these words of Christ. They have nothing to do with you.

Let us look at one or two of the occasions on which this loneliness was felt.

The first time was when He was but twelve years old, when His parents found Him in the temple, hearing the doctors and asking them questions. High thoughts were in the Child's soul : expanding views of life : larger views of duty and His own destiny.

There is a moment in every true life—to some it comes very early—when the old routine of duty is not large enough—when the parental roof seems too low, because the Infinite above is arching over the soul—when the old formulas, in creeds, catechisms, and articles, seem to be narrow, and they must either be thrown aside, or else transformed into living and breathing realities—when the earthly father's authority is being superseded by the claims of a Father in heaven.

That is a lonely, lonely moment, when the young soul first feels God—when this earth is recognised as an “awful place, yea, the very gate of heaven.” When the dream-ladder is seen planted against the skies, and we wake, and the dream haunts us as a sublime reality.

You may detect the approach of that moment in the young man or the young woman by the awakened spirit of inquiry : by a certain restlessness of look, and an eager earnestness of tone : by the devouring study of all kinds of books : by the waning of your own influence, while the inquirer is asking the truth of the Doctors and Teachers in the vast Temple of the world : by a certain opinionativeness,

196 ' The Loneliness of Christ

which is austere and disagreeable enough : but the austere moment of the fruit's taste is that in which it is passing from greenness into ripeness. If you wait in patience, the sour will become sweet. Rightly looked at, that opinionativeness is more truly anguish : the fearful solitude of feeling the insecurity of all that is human ; the discovery that life is real, and many forms of social and religious existence hollow. The old moorings are torn away, and the soul is drifting, drifting, drifting, very often without compass, except the guidance of an unseen hand, into the vast infinite of God. Then come the lonely words, and no wonder, "How is it that ye sought Me? Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?"

2. That solitude was felt by Christ in trial. In the desert : in Pilate's judgment-hall : in the garden, He was alone—and alone must every son of man meet his trial-hour. The individuality of the soul necessitates that. Each man is a new soul in this world : untried, with a boundless Possible before him. No one can predict what he may become, prescribe his duties, or mark out his obligations. Each man's own nature has its own peculiar rules : and he must take up his life-plan alone, and persevere in it in a perfect privacy with which no stranger intermeddles. Each man's temptations are made up of a host of peculiarities, internal and external, which no other mind can measure. You are tried alone—alone you pass into the desert—alone you must bear and conquer in the Agony—alone you must be sifted by the world. There are moments known only to a man's own self, when he sits by the poisoned springs of existence, "yearning for a morrow which shall free him from the strife." And there are trials more terrible than that. Not when vicious inclinations are opposed to holy, but when virtue conflicts with virtue, is the real rending of the soul in twain. A temptation, in which the lower nature struggles for mastery, can be met by the whole united force of the spirit. But it is when obedience to a heavenly Father can be only paid by disobedience to an earthly one :

or fidelity to duty can be only kept by infidelity to some entangling engagement : or the straight path must be taken over the misery of others ; or the counsel of the affectionate friend must be met with a "Get thee behind me, Satan,"—Oh ! it is then, when human advice is unavailable, that the soul feels what it is to be alone.

Once more—the Redeemer's soul was alone in dying. The hour had come—they were all gone, and He was, as He predicted, left alone. All that is human drops from us in that hour. Human faces flit and fade, and the sounds of the world become confused. "I shall die alone"—yes, and alone you live. The philosopher tells us that no atom in creation touches another atom—they only approach within a certain distance ; then the attraction ceases, and an invisible something repels—they only *seem* to touch. No soul touches another soul except at one or two points ; and those chiefly external,—a fearful and a lonely thought ; but one of the truest of life. Death only realizes that which has been the fact all along. In the central deeps of our being we are alone.

II. The spirit or temper of that solitude.

I. Observe its grandeur. I am alone, yet not alone. There is a feeble and sentimental way in which we speak of the Man of sorrows. We turn to the cross, and the agony, and the loneliness, to touch the softer feelings, to arouse compassion. You degrade *that* loneliness by your compassion. Compassion ! compassion for Him ! Adore if you will—respect and reverence that sublime solitariness with which none but the Father was—but no pity : let it draw out the firmer and manlier graces of the soul. Even tender sympathy seems out of place.

For even in human things, the strength that is in a man can be only learnt when he is thrown upon his own resources and left alone. What a man can do in conjunction with others does not test the man. Tell us what he can do alone. It is one thing to defend the truth when you know that your audience are already prepossessed, and that every argument

198 ' The Loneliness of Christ

will meet a willing response : and it is another thing to hold the truth when truth must be supported, if at all, alone—met by cold looks and unsympathizing suspicion. It is one thing to rush on to danger with the shouts and the sympathy of numbers : it is another thing when the lonely chieftain of the sinking ship sees the last boatful disengage itself, and folds his arms to go down into the majesty of darkness, crushed, but not subdued.

Such and greater far was the strength and majesty of the Saviour's solitariness. It was not the trial of the lonely hermit. There is a certain gentle and pleasing melancholy in the life which is lived alone. But there are the forms of nature to speak to him, and he has not the positive opposition of mankind if he has the absence of actual sympathy. It is a solemn thing, doubtless, to be apart from men, and to feel eternity rushing by like an arrowy river. But the solitude of Christ was the solitude of a crowd. In that single Human bosom dwelt the Thought which was to be the germ of the world's life : a thought unshared, misunderstood, or rejected. Can you not feel the grandeur of those words, when the Man reposing on His solitary strength, felt the last shadow of perfect isolation pass across His soul : " My God, My God, why hast *Thou* forsaken Me ? "

Next, learn from these words self-reliance. " Ye shall leave Me alone. " Alone then the Son of man was content to be. He threw Himself on His own solitary thought : did not go down to meet the world ; but waited, though it might be for ages, till the world should come round to Him. He appealed to the Future—did not aim at seeming consistent : left His contradictions unexplained :—" I came from the Father—I leave the world, and go to the Father. " " Now, " said they, " thou speakest no proverb : " that is, enigma. But many a hard and enigmatical saying before He had spoken, and He left them all. A thread runs through all true acts, stringing them together into one harmonious chain : but it is not for the Son of God to be anxious to prove their consistency with each other.

This is self-reliance—to repose calmly on the thought

The Loneliness of Christ 199

which is deepest in our bosoms, and be unmoved if the world will not accept it yet. To live on your own convictions against the world, is to overcome the world—to believe that what is truest in you is true for all : to abide by that, and not be over-anxious to be heard or understood, or sympathized with, certain that at last all must acknowledge the same, and that while you stand firm, the world will come round to you : that is independence. It is not difficult to get away into retirement, and there live upon your own convictions : nor is it difficult to mix with men, and follow their convictions : but to enter into the world, and there live out firmly and fearlessly according to your own conscience, that is Christian greatness.

There is a cowardice in this age which is not Christian. We shrink from the consequences of truth. We look round and cling dependently. We ask what men will think ; what others will say—whether they will not stare in astonishment. Perhaps they will ; but he who is calculating that, will accomplish nothing in this life. The Father—the Father which is with us and in us—what does he think ? God's work cannot be done without a spirit of independence. A man is got some way in the Christian life when he has learned to say humbly and yet majestically, "I dare to be alone."

Lastly,—remark the humility of this loneliness. Had the Son of man simply said, I can be alone, He would have said no more than any proud, self-relying man can say. But when He added, "because the Father is with Me," that independence assumed another character, and self-reliance became only another form of reliance upon God. Distinguish between genuine and spurious humility. There is a false humility which says, "It is my own poor thought, and I must not trust it. I must distrust my own reason and judgment, because they are my own. I must not accept the dictates of my own conscience, for is it not my own, and is not trust in self the great fault of our fallen nature ?"

Very well. Now, remember something else. There is a spirit which beareth witness with our spirits—there is a God

200 : The Loneliness of Christ

who "is not far from any one of us"—there is a "Light which lighteth every man which cometh into the world." Do not be unnaturally humble. The thought of your mind perchance is the Thought of God. To refuse to follow that may be to disown God. To take the judgment and conscience of other men to live by, where is the humility of that? From whence did their conscience and judgment come? Was the fountain from which they drew exhausted for you? If they refuse like you to rely on their own conscience, and you rely upon it, how are you sure that it is more the Mind of God than your own which you have refused to hear?

Look at it in another way. The charm of the words of great men, those grand sayings which are recognised as true as soon as heard, is this, that you recognise them as wisdom which has passed across your own mind. You feel that they are your own thoughts come back to you, else you would not at once admit them: "All that floated across me before, only I could not say it, and did not feel confident enough to assert it: or had not conviction enough to put it into words." Yes, God spoke to you what He did to them: only they believed it, said it, trusted the Word within them, and you did not. Be sure that often when you say, "it is only my own poor thought, and I am alone,"—the real correcting thought is this, "alone, but the Father is with me,"—therefore I can live that lonely conviction.

There is no danger in this, whatever timid minds may think—no danger of mistake, if the character be a true one. For we are not left in uncertainty in this matter. It is given to us to know our base from our noble hours: to distinguish between the voice which is from above, and that which speaks from below, out of the abyss of our animal and selfish nature. Samuel could distinguish between the impulse, quite a human one, which would have made him select Eliab out of Jesse's sons, and the deeper judgment by which "the *Lord* said, Look not on his countenance, nor on the height of his stature, for I have refused him." Doubtless

deep truth of character is required for this : for the whispering voices get mixed together, and we dare not abide by our own thoughts, because we think them our own, and not God's : and this because we only now and then endeavour to know in earnest. It is only given to the habitually true to know the difference. He knew it, because all His blessed life along He could say, "My judgment is just, *because* I seek not My own will, but the will of Him which sent Me."

The practical result and inference of all this is a very simple, but a very deep one : the deepest of existence. Let life be a life of faith. Do not go timorously about, inquiring what others think, what others believe, and what others say. It seems the easiest, it is the most difficult thing in life, to do this—believe in God. God is near you. Throw yourself fearlessly upon Him. Trembling mortal, there is an unknown might within your soul which will wake when you command it. The day may come when all that is human, man and woman, will fall off from you, as they did from Him. Let His strength be yours. Be independent of them all now. The Father is with you. Look to Him, and He will save you.

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

JOHN x. 14, 15.—"I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father : and I lay down my life for the sheep."

As these words stand in the English translation, it is hard to see any connexion between the thoughts that are brought together.

It is asserted that Christ is the good Shepherd, and knows His sheep. It is also asserted that He knows the

202 : The Good Shepherd

Father ; but between these two truths there is no express connexion. And again, it is declared that He lays down His life for the sheep. This follows directly after the assertion that He knows the Father. Again, we are at a loss to say what one of these truths has to do with the other.

But the whole difficulty vanishes with the alteration of a single stop and a single word. Let the words "even so" be exchanged for the word "and." Four times in these verses the same word occurs. Three times out of these four it is translated "and,"—*and* know my sheep, *and* am known, *and* I lay down my life. All that is required then is, that in consistency it shall be translated by the same word in the fourth case: for "even so" substitute "and": then strike away the full stop after "mine," and read the whole sentence thus: "I am the good shepherd, and know My sheep, and am known of Mine as the Father knoweth Me, *and* as I know the Father: and I lay down My life for the sheep."

At once our Redeemer's thought becomes clear. There is a reciprocal affection between the Shepherd and the sheep. There is a reciprocal affection between the Father and the Son; and the one is the parallel of the other. The affection between the Divine Shepherd and His flock can be compared, for the closeness of its intimacy, with nothing but the affection between the Eternal Father and the Son of His Love. As the Father knows the Son, so does the Shepherd know the sheep: as the Son knows the Father, so do the sheep know their heavenly Shepherd.

- I. The pastoral character claimed by Christ.
- II. The proofs which substantiate the claim.

I. The Son of Man claims to Himself the name of Shepherd.

Now we shall not learn anything from that, unless we enter humbly and affectionately into the spirit of Christ's

teaching. It is the heart alone which can give us a key to His words. Recollect *how* He taught. By metaphors, by images, by illustrations, boldly, figurative in rich variety—yes, in daring abundance. He calls Himself a gate—a king—a vine—a shepherd—a thief in the night. In every one of these He appeals to certain feelings and associations. What He says can only be interpreted by such associations. They must be understood by a living heart: a cold, clear intellect will make nothing of them. If you take those glorious expressions, pregnant with almost boundless thought, and lay them down as so many articles of rigid, stiff theology, you turn life into death. It is just as if a chemist were to analyze a fruit or a flower, and then imagine that he had told you what a fruit and a flower are. He separates them into their elements, names them, and numbers them: but those elements, weighed, measured, numbered in the exact proportions that made up the beautiful living thing, are not the living thing—no, nor anything like it. Your science is very profound, no doubt; but the fruit is crushed, and the grace of the flower is gone.

It is in this way often that we deal with the words of Christ, when we anatomize them and analyze them. Theology is very necessary, chemistry is very necessary; but chemistry destroys life to analyze, murders to dissect; and theology very often kills religion out of words before it can cut them up into propositions.

Here is a living truth which our cold reasonings have often torn into dead fragments—"I am the good Shepherd." In this northern England, it is hard to get the living associations of the East with which such an expression is full.

The pastoral life and duty in the East is very unlike that of the shepherds on our bleak hillsides and downs. Here the connexion between the shepherd and the sheep is simply one of pecuniary interest. Ask an English shepherd about his flock, he can tell you the numbers and the value; he knows the market in which each was pur-

chased, and the remunerating price at which it can be disposed of. There is before him so much stock convertible into so much money.

Beneath the burning skies and the clear starry nights of Palestine there grows up between the shepherd and his flock a union of attachment and tenderness. It is the country where at any moment sheep are liable to be swept away by some mountain-torrent, or carried off by hill-robbers, or torn by wolves. At any moment their protector may have to save them by personal hazard. The shepherd-king tells us how, in defence of his father's flock, he slew a lion and a bear : and Jacob reminds Laban how, when he watched Laban's sheep in the day the drought consumed. Every hour of the shepherd's life is risk. Sometimes for the sake of an armful of grass in the parched summer days, he must climb precipices almost perpendicular, and stand on a narrow ledge of rock, where the wild goat will scarcely venture. Pitiless showers, driving snows, long hours of thirst—all this he must endure, if the flock is to be kept at all.

And thus there grows up between the man and the dumb creatures he protects, a kind of friendship. For this is after all the true school in which love is taught, dangers mutually shared, and hardships borne together ; these are the things which make generous friendship—risk cheerfully encountered for another's sake. You love those for whom you risk, and they love you ; therefore it is that, not as here where the flock is driven, the shepherd goes before, and the sheep follow him. They follow in perfect trust, even though he should be leading them away from a green pasture, by a rocky road, to another pasture which they cannot yet see. He knows them all—their separate histories—their ailments—their characters.

Now, let it be observed, how much in all this connexion there is of *heart*—of real, personal attachment, almost inconceivable to us. It is strange how deep the sympathy may become between the higher and the lower being : nay,

even between the being that has life and what is lifeless. Alone almost in the desert, the Arab and his horse are one family. Alone in those vast solitudes, with no human being near, the shepherd and the sheep feel a life in common. Differences disappear, the vast interval between the man and the brute: the single point of union is felt strongly. One is the love of the protector: the other the love of the grateful life: and so between lives so distant there is woven by night and day, by summer suns and winter frosts, a living network of sympathy. The greater and the less mingle their being together: they feel each other. "The shepherd knows his sheep, and is known of them."

The men to whom Christ said these words felt all this and more, the moment He had said them, which it has taken me many minutes to draw out in dull sentences: for He appealed to the familiar associations of their daily life, and calling Himself a Shepherd, touched strings which would vibrate with many a tender and pure recollection of their childhood. And unless we try, by realizing such scenes, to supply what they felt by association, the words of Christ will be only hard, dry, lifeless words to us: for all Christ's teaching is a Divine Poetry, luxuriant in metaphor, overflowing with truth too large for accurate sentences, truth which only a heart alive can appreciate. More than half the heresies into which Christian sects have blundered, have merely come from mistaking for dull prose what prophets and apostles said in those highest moments of the soul, when Seraphim kindle the sentences of the pen and lip into poetry. "This is My body." Chill that into prose, and it becomes Transubstantiation. "I am the Good Shepherd." In the dry and merciless logic of a commentary, trying laboriously to find out minute points of ingenious resemblance in which Christ is like a shepherd, the glory and the tenderness of this sentence are dried up.

But try to feel, by imagining what the lonely Syrian shepherd must feel towards the helpless things which are the companions of his daily life, for whose safety he stands

in jeopardy every hour, and whose value is measurable to him not by price, but by his own jeopardy, and then we have reached some notion of the love which Jesus meant to represent, that Eternal Tenderness which bends over us—infinitely lower though we be in nature—and knows the name of each and the trials of each, and thinks for each with a separate solicitude, and gave Itself for each with a Sacrifice as special and a Love as personal, as if in the whole world's wilderness there were none other but that one.

To the name Shepherd, Christ adds an emphatic word of much significance: "I am the *Good* Shepherd." Good, not in the sense of benevolent, but in the sense of genuine, true born, of the real kind—just as wine of nobler quality is good compared with the cheaper sort, just as a soldier is good or noble who is a soldier in heart, and not a soldier by mere profession or for pay. It is the same word used by St. Paul when he speaks of a good, *i. e.* a noble soldier of Christ. Certain peculiar qualifications make the genuine soldier—certain peculiar qualifications make the genuine or good shepherd.

Now this expression distinguishes the shepherd from two sorts of men who may also be keepers of the sheep: shepherds, but not shepherds of the true blood. 1. From robbers. 2. From hirelings.

1. Robbers may turn shepherds: they may keep the sheep, but they guard them only for their own purposes, simply for the flesh and fleece: they have not a true shepherd's heart, any more than a pirate has the true sailor's heart and the true sailor's loyalty. There were many such marauders on the hills of Galilee and Judea: such, for example, as those from whom David and his band protected Nabal's flocks on Mount Carmel.

And many such nominal shepherds had the people of Israel had in bygone years: rulers in whom the art of ruling had been but kingcraft; teachers whose instruction to the people had been but priestcraft. Government, statesmanship, teachership—these are pastoral callings—sublime,

even Godlike. For only consider it :—wise rule, chivalrous protection, loving guidance,—what diviner work than these has the Master given to the shepherds of the people? But when the work is done, even well done, whether it be by statesmen or by pastors, for the sake of party or place, or honour, or personal consistency, or preferment, it is not the spirit of the genuine shepherd, but of the robber. No wonder He said, “All that ever came before Me were thieves and robbers.”

Again, hirelings are shepherds, but not good shepherds, of the right pure kind : they are tested by danger. “He that is an hireling, and not the good shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth ; and the wolf catches them, and scattereth the sheep.”

Now a man is a hireling when he does his duty for pay. He may do it in his way faithfully. The paid shepherd would not desert the sheep for a shower or a cold night. But the lion and the bear—he is not paid to risk his life against them, and the sheep are not his, so he leaves them to their fate. So, in the same way, a man may be a hired priest, as Demetrius was at Ephesus : “By this craft we get our living.” Or a paid demagogue, a great champion of rights, and an investigator of abuses—paid by applause ; and while popularity lasts, he will be a reformer—deserting the people when danger comes. There is no vital union between the champion and the defenceless—the teacher and the taught. The cause of the sheep is not *his* cause.

Exactly the reverse of this Christ asserts in calling Himself the *Good* Shepherd. He is a good, genuine, or true-born sailor who feels that the ship is as it were his own ; whose point of chivalrous honour is to save his ship rather than himself—not to survive her. He is a good, genuine, or true-born shepherd who has the spirit of his calling, is an enthusiast in it, has the true shepherd’s heart, and makes the cause of his sheep his cause.

Brethren, the cause of man was the cause of Christ.

He did no hireling's work. The only pay He got was hatred, a crown of thorns, and the cross. He might have escaped it all. He might have been the Leader of the people and their king. He might have converted the idolatry of an hour into the hosannas of a lifetime: if He would but have conciliated the Pharisees, instead of bidding them defiance and exasperating their bigotry against Him: if He would but have explained, and, like some demagogue called to account, trimmed away His sublime sharp-edged truths about oppression and injustice until they became harmless, because meaningless: if He would have but left unsaid those rough things about the consecrated Temple and the Sabbath days: if He would but have left undisputed the hereditary title of Israel to God's favour, and not stung the national vanity by telling them that trust in God justifies the Gentile as entirely as the Jew: if He would but have taught less prominently that hateful doctrine of the salvability of the heathen Gentiles and the heretic Samaritans, and the universal Fatherhood of God: if He would but have stated with less angularity of edge His central truth,—that not by mere compliance with law, but by a spirit transcending law, even the spirit of the cross and self-sacrifice, can the soul of man be atoned to God:—that would have saved Him. But that would have been the desertion of the cause—God's cause and man's—the cause of the ignorant defenceless sheep, whose very salvation depended on the keeping of that gospel intact: therefore the Shepherd gave His life a Witness to the Truth, and a sacrifice to God. It was a profound truth that the populace gave utterance to when they taunted Him on the cross: "He saved others, Himself He cannot save." No of course not; He that will save others *cannot* save Himself.

Of that pastoral character He gives here three proofs. I know My sheep—am known of Mine—I lay down My life for the sheep.

1. I know My sheep, as the Father knoweth Me. In other words, as unerringly as His Father read His heart, so

unerringly did He read the heart of man and recognise His own.

Ask we how? An easy reply, and a common one, would be—He recognised them by the Godhead in Him: His mind was Divine, therefore omniscient: He knew all things, therefore He knew what was in man: and therefore He knew His own.

But we must not slur over His precious words in this way. The Divinity of His is made the pass-key by which we open all mysteries with fatal facility, and save ourselves from thinking of them. We get a dogma and cover truth with it: we satisfy ourselves with saying Christ was God, and lose the precious humanities of His heart and life.

There is here a deep truth of human nature, for He does not limit that recognising power to Himself—He says that the sheep know Him as truly as He the sheep. He knew men on the same principle on which we know men—the same on which we know Him. The only difference is in degree: He knows with infinitely more unerringness than we, but the knowledge is the same in kind.

Let us think of this. There is a certain mysterious tact of sympathy and antipathy by which we discover the like and unlike of ourselves in others' character. You cannot find out a man's opinions unless he chooses to express them; but his feelings and his character you may. He cannot hide them: you feel them in his look and mien, and tones and motion.

There is, for instance, a certain something in sincerity and reality which cannot be mistaken—a certain something in real grief which the most artistic counterfeit cannot imitate. It is distinguished by nature, not education. There is something in an impure heart which purity detects afar off. Marvellous it is how innocence perceives the approach of evil which it cannot know by experience, just as the dove which has never seen a falcon trembles by instinct at its approach; just as a blind man detects by finer sensitiveness the passing of the cloud which he cannot

see overshadowing the sun. It is wondrous how the truer we become, the more unerringly we know the *ring* of truth, discern whether a man be true or not, and can fasten at once upon the rising lie in word and look, and dissembling act. Wondrous how the charity of Christ in the heart finely perceives the slightest aberration from charity in others, in ungentle thought or slanderous tone.

Therefore Christ knew His sheep, by that mystic power always finest in the best natures, most developed in the highest, by which Like detects what is like and what unlike itself. He was Perfect Love—Perfect Truth—Perfect Purity: therefore He knew what was in man, and felt, as by another sense, afar off the shadows of unlovingness, and falseness, and impurity.

No one can have read the Gospels without remarking that they ascribe to Him unerring skill in reading man. People, we read, began to show enthusiasm for Him. But Jesus did not trust Himself unto them, "for He knew what was in man." He knew that the flatterers of to-day would be the accusers of to-morrow. Nathaniel stood before Him. He had scarcely spoken a word; but at once unhesitatingly, to Nathaniel's own astonishment,—Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile!" There came to Him a young man with vast possessions: a single sentence, an exaggerated epithet, an excited manner, revealed his character. Enthusiastic and amiable, Jesus loved him: capable of obedience, on life's sunshine and prosperity, ay, and capable of aspiration after something more than mere obedience, but not of sacrifice. Jesus tested him to the quick, and the young man failed. He did not try to call him back, for He knew what was in him and what was not. He read through Zaccheus when he climbed into the sycamore-tree, despised by the people as a publican, really a son of Abraham: through Judas, with his benevolent saying about the selling of the alabaster-box for the poor, and his false kiss: through the curses of the thief upon the cross, a faith that could be saved: through the zeal of the

man who in a fit of enthusiasm offered to go with Him whithersoever He would. He read through the Pharisees, and His whole being shuddered with the recoil of utter and irreconcilable aversion.

It was as if His bosom was some mysterious mirror on which all that came near Him left a sullied or unsullied surface, detecting themselves by every breath.

Now distinguish that Divine power from that cunning sagacity which men call knowingness in the matter of character. The worldly wise have maxims and rules; but the finer shades and delicacies of truth of character escape them. They would prudently avoid Zaccheus—a publican: they—

There is a very solemn aspect in which this power of Jesus to know man presents itself. It is this which qualifies Him for judgment—this perfection of human sympathy. Perfect sympathy with every most delicate line of good implies exquisite antipathy to every shadow of a shade of evil. God hath given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man. On sympathy the final awards of Heaven and Hell are built: Attraction and Repulsion, the law of the magnet. To each pole all that has affinity with itself; to Christ all that is Christlike: *from* Christ all that is not Christlike—for ever and for ever. Eternal judgment is nothing more than the carrying out of these words, “I know My sheep:”—for the obverse of them is, “I never knew *you*, depart from Me all ye that work iniquity.”

The second proof which Christ alleges of the genuineness of His pastorate is that His sheep know *Him*.

How shall we recognise Truth Divine? What is the test by which we shall know whether it comes from God or not? They tell us we know Christ to be from God because He wrought miracles: we know a doctrine to be from God because we find it written: or because it is sustained by an universal consent of fathers.

That is—for observe what this argument implies—there is something more evident than truth: Truth cannot prove

~~itself~~ : we want something else to prove it. Our souls judge of truth—our senses judge of miracles ; and the evidence of our senses—the lowest part of our nature—is more certain than the evidence of our souls by which we must partake of God.

Now to say so, is to say that you cannot be sure that it is midday or morning sunshine unless you look at the sundial : you cannot be sure that the sun is shining in the heavens unless you see his shadow on the dial-plate. The dial is valuable to a man who never reads the heavens—the shadow is good for him who has not watched the sun ; but for a man who lives in perpetual contemplation of the sun in heaven, the sunshine needs no evidence, and every hour is known.

Now Christ says, “My sheep know *Me*.” Wisdom is justified by her children. Not by some lengthened investigation, whether the shepherd’s dress be the identical dress, and the staff and the crozier genuine, do the sheep recognise the shepherd. They know *him*, they hear his voice, they know him as a man knows his friend.

They know him in short, *instinctively*. Just so does the soul recognise what is of God and true. Truth is like light : visible in itself, not distinguished by the shadows that it casts. There is a something in our souls of God, which corresponds with what is of God outside us, and recognises it by direct intuition : something in the true soul which corresponds with truth and knows it to be truth. Christ came with truth, and the true recognise it as true : the sheep know the Shepherd, wanting no further evidence. Take a few examples : “God is Love.” “What shall a man give in exchange for his soul ?” “He that saveth his life shall lose it : and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.” “All things are possible to him that believeth.” “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” “God is a Spirit.”

Now the wise men of intellect and logical acumen wanted proof of these truths. Give us, said they, your credentials.

"By what authority doest thou these things?" They wanted a sign from heaven to prove that the truth was true, and the life He led, Godlike, and not devil-like. How can we be sure that it is not from Beelzebub, the prince of the devils, that these deeds and sayings come? We must be quite sure that we are not taking a message from hell as one from heaven. Give us demonstration, chains of evidence—chapter and verse—authority.

But simple men had decided the matter already. They knew very little of antiquity, church authority, and shadows of coming events which prophecy casts before: but their eyes saw the light, and their hearts felt the present God. Wise Pharisees and learned doctors said, to account for a wondrous miracle, "Give God the glory."

But the poor unlettered man, whose blinded eye had for the first time looked on a face of love, replied—"Whether this man be a sinner or not, I know not: one thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see."

The well-read Jews could not settle the literary question, whether the marks of His appearance coincided with the prophecies. But the Samaritans *felt* the life of God: "Now we believe, not because of thy word, but because we have heard Him ourselves and *know* that this is indeed the Christ."

The Shepherd had come, and the sheep knew His voice.

Brethren, in all matters of eternal truth, the soul is before the intellect: the things of God are spiritually discerned. You know truth by being true: you recognise God by being like Him. The scribe comes and says, I will prove to you that this is sound doctrine by chapter and verse, by what the old and best writers say, by evidence such as convinces the intellect of an intelligent lawyer or jurymen. Think you the conviction of faith is got in that way?

Christ did not teach like the scribes. He spoke His truth. He said, "If any man believe not, I judge him not; the word which I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." It was true, and the guilt of disbelieving it was not an error of the intellect, but a sin of the heart.

Let us stand upright: let us be sure that the test of truth is the soul within us. Not at second-hand can we have assurance of what is divine and what is not: only at first-hand. The sheep of Christ hear His voice.

The third proof given by Christ was pastoral fidelity: "I lay down my life for the sheep." Now here is the doctrine of vicarious sacrifice: the sacrifice of one instead of another: life saved by the sacrifice of another life.

Most of us know the meagre explanation of these words which satisfies the Unitarians: they say that Christ merely died as a martyr, in attestation of the truths He taught.

But you will observe the strength of the expression which we cannot explain away, "I lay down My life *for*," *i. e.* instead of "the sheep." If the Shepherd had not sacrificed Himself, the sheep must have been the sacrifice.

Observe, however, the suffering of Christ was not the same suffering as that from which He saved us. The suffering of Christ was death. But the suffering from which He redeemed us by death was more terrible than death. The pit into which He descended was the grave. But the pit in which we should have been lost for ever, was the pit of selfishness and despair.

Therefore St. Paul affirms, "If Christ be not risen, ~~ye~~ are yet in your *sins*." If Christ's resurrection be a dream, and He be not risen from the grave of death, you are yet in the grave of guilt. He bore suffering to free us from what is worse than suffering—sin: temporal death to save us from death everlasting: His life given as an offering for sin to save the soul's eternal life.

Now in the text this sacrificing love of Christ is paralleled by the love of the Father to the Son. As He loved the sheep, so the Father had loved Him. Therefore the sacrifice of Christ is but a mirror of the love of God. The love of the Father to the Son is self-sacrificing Love.

You know that shallow men make themselves merry with this doctrine. The sacrifice of God, they say, is a figment, and an impossibility. Nevertheless this parallel tells us

that it is one of the deepest truths of all the universe. It is the profound truth which the ancient fathers endeavoured to express in the doctrine of the Trinity. For what is the love of the Father to the Son—Himself yet not Himself—but the grand truth of Eternal Love losing itself and finding itself again in the being of another? What is it but the sublime expression of the unselfishness of God?

It is a profound, glorious truth; I wish I knew how to put it in intelligible words. But if these words of Christ do not make it intelligible to the heart, how can any words of mine? The life of blessedness—the life of love—the life of sacrifice—the life of God, are identical. All love is sacrifice—the giving of life and self for others. God's life is sacrifice—for the Father loves the Son as the Son loves the sheep for whom He gave His life.

Whoever will humbly ponder upon this, will, I think, understand the Atonement better than all theology can teach him. O, my brethren, leave men to quarrel as they will about the theology of the Atonement; here in these words is the religion of it—the blessed, all-satisfying religion for our hearts. The self-sacrifice of Christ was the *satisfaction* to the Father.

How could the Father be *satisfied* with the death of Christ, unless He saw in the sacrifice mirrored His own love?—for God can be satisfied only with that which is perfect as Himself. Agony does not satisfy God—agony only satisfied Moloch. Nothing satisfies God but the voluntary sacrifice of Love.

The pain of Christ gave God no pleasure—only the love that was tested by pain—the love of perfect obedience. He was obedient unto death.

THE FIRST MIRACLE

I. THE GLORY OF THE VIRGIN MOTHER

JOHN ii. 11.—“This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him.”

THIS was the “beginning of Miracles,” which Jesus did, and yet He was now thirty years of age. For thirty years He had done no miracle; and that is in itself almost worthy to be called a miracle. That He abstained for thirty years from the exertion of His wonder-working power is as marvellous as that He possessed for three years the power to exert. He was content to live long in deep obscurity. Nazareth, with its quiet valley, was world enough for Him. There was no disposition to rush into publicity: no haste to be known in the world. The quiet consciousness of power which breathes in that expression, “Mine hour is not yet come,” had marked His whole life. He could bide His time. He had the strength to wait.

This was true greatness—the greatness of man, because also the greatness of God: for such is God’s way in all He does. In all the works of God there is a conspicuous absence of haste and hurry. All that He does ripens slowly. Six slow days and nights of creative force before man was made: two thousand years to discipline and form a Jewish people: four thousand years of darkness, and ignorance, and crime, before the fulness of the Time had come, when He could send forth His Son: unnumbered ages of war before the thousand years of solid peace can come. Whatever contradicts this Divine plan must pay the price of haste—brief duration. All that is done before the hour is come, decays fast. All precocious things ripened before their time wither before their time: precocious fruit—precocious minds—forced feelings. “He that believeth shall not make haste.”

The Glory of the Virgin Mother 217

We shall distribute the various thoughts which this event suggests under two heads.

I. The Glory of the Virgin Mother.

II. The Glory of the Divine Son.

I. The Glory of the Virgin Mother.

In the First Epistle to the Corinthians, St. Paul speaks of the glory of the woman as of a thing distinct from the glory of the man. They are the two opposite poles of the sphere of humanity. Their provinces are not the same, but different. The qualities which are beautiful as predominant in one are not beautiful when predominant in the other. That which is the glory of the one is not the glory of the other. The glory of her who was highly favoured among women, and whom all Christendom has agreed in contemplating as the Type and ideal of her sex, was glory in a different order from that in which her Son exhibited the glory of a perfect manhood. A glory different in *degree*, of course:—the one was only human, the other more than human, the Word made flesh, but different in *order* too: the one manifesting forth *her* glory—the grace of womanhood: the other manifesting forth *His* glory—the Wisdom and the Majesty of Manhood, in which God dwelt.

Different orders or kinds of glory. Let us consider the glory of the Virgin, which is, in other words, the glory of what is womanly in character.

Remarkable, first of all, in this respect, is her considerateness. There is gentle, womanly tact in those words, "They have no wine." Unselfish thoughtfulness about others' comforts, not her own: delicate anxiety to save a straitened family from the exposure of their poverty: and moreover, for this is very worthy of observation, carefulness about gross, material things: a sensual thing, we might truly say—wine, the instrument of intoxication: yet see how her feminine tenderness transfigured and sanctified such gross and common things—how that wine which, as used by the revellers of the banquet, might be coarse and sensual, was

in her use sanctified, as it was by unselfishness and charity : a thing quite heavenly, glorified by the Ministry of Love.

It was so that in old times, with thoughtful hospitality, Rebekah offered water at the well to Abraham's way-worn servant. It was so that Martha showed her devotion to her Lord even to excess, being cumbered with much serving. It was so that the women ministered to Christ out of their substance—water, food, money. They took these low things of earth, and spiritualized them into means of hospitality and devotion.

And this is the glory of womanhood : surely no common glory : surely one which, if she rightly comprehended her place on earth, might enable her to accept its apparent humiliation unrepiningly ; the glory of unsensualizing coarse and common things, sensual things, the objects of mere sense, meat and drink and household cares, elevating them by the spirit in which she ministers them, into something transfigured and sublime.

The humblest mother of a poor family who is cumbered with much serving, or watching over a hospitality which she is too poor to delegate to others, or toiling for love's sake in household work, needs no emancipation in God's sight. It is the prerogative and the glory of her womanhood to consecrate the meanest things by a ministry which is not for self.

2. Submission.

"Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it." Here is the true spirit of Obedience. Not slavishness, but entire loyalty and perfect trust in a Person whom we reverence. She did not comprehend her Son's strange repulse and mysterious words ; but she knew that they were not capricious words, for there was no caprice in Him : she knew that the law which ruled His will was Right, and that importunity was useless. So she bade them reverently wait in silence till His time should come.

Here is another distinctive glory of womanhood. In the very outset of the Bible, submission is revealed as her peculiar lot and destiny. If you were merely to look at the

The Glory of the Virgin Mother: 219

words as they stand, declaring the results of the Fall, you would be inclined to call that vocation of obedience a curse; but in the spirit of Christ it is transformed, like Labour, into a blessing. In this passage one peculiar blessing stands connected with it.

Here a twofold blessing is connected with it: Freedom from all doubt; and prevailing power in prayer.

The first is freedom from all doubt. The Virgin seems to have felt no perplexity at that rebuke and seeming refusal; and yet perplexity and misgiving would seem natural. A more masculine and imperious mind would have been startled; made sullen, or begun at once to sound the depths of metaphysics, reasoning upon the hardship of a lot which cannot realize all its wishes: wondering why such simple blessings are refused, pondering deeply on Divine decrees, ending perhaps in scepticism. Mary was saved from this. She could not understand, but she could trust and wait. Not for one moment did a shade of doubt rest upon her heart. At once and instantly, "Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it." And so too, the Syrophenician woman was not driven to speculate on the injustice of her destiny by the seeming harshness of Christ's reply. She drew closer to her Lord in prayer. Affection and submissiveness saved them both from doubt. Women both.

Now there are whole classes of our fellow-creatures, to whom, as a class, the anguish of religious doubt never or rarely comes. Mental doubt rarely touches women. Soldiers and sailors do not doubt. Their religion is remarkable for its simplicity and childlike character. Scarcely ever are religious warriors tormented with scepticism or doubts. And in all, I believe for the same reason, the habits of feeling to which the long life of obedience trains the soul. Prompt, quick, unquestioning obedience: that is the soil for faith.

I call this therefore, the glory of womanhood. It is the true glory of human beings to obey. It is her special glory, rising out of the very weakness of her nature, God's strength made perfect in weakness. England will not soon forget

that lesson left her as the bequest of a great life. Her buried Hero's glory came out of that which was manliest in his character—the Virgin's spirit of obedience.

The second glory resulting from it, is prevailing power with God. Her wish was granted. "What have I to do with thee?" were words that only asserted His own perfect independence. They were not the language of rebuke. As Messiah, He gently vindicated His acts from interference, showing the filial relation to be in its first strictness dissolved. But as Son He obeyed, or to speak more properly, complied. Nay, probably His look had said that already, promising more than His words, setting her mind at rest, and granting the favour she desired.

Brethren, the subject of prayer is a deep mystery. To the masculine intellect it is a demonstrable absurdity. For, says logic, how can man's will modify the will of God, or alter the fixed decree? And if it cannot, wherein lies the use of prayer? But there is a something mightier than intellect and truer than logic. It is the faith which works by love—the conviction that in this world of mystery, that which cannot be put in words, nor defended by argument, may yet be true. The Will of Christ was fixed, what could be the use of intercession? and yet the Virgin's feeling was true—her prayer would prevail.

Here is a grand paradox, which is the paradox of all prayer. The heart hopes that which to reasoning seems impossible. And I believe we never pray aright except when we pray in that feminine childlike spirit: which no logic can defend, feeling *as if* we modified the will of God, though that will is fixed.

It is the glory of the spirit that is affectionate and submissive that it, ay and it alone, *can* pray, because it alone can believe that its prayer will be granted; and it is the glory of that spirit too, that its prayer will be granted.

3rdly, In all Christian ages the especial glory ascribed to the Virgin Mother is purity of heart and life. Implied in the term "Virgin!" Gradually in the history of the Christian church the recognition of this became idolatry.⁴ The works

The Glory of the Virgin Mother 221

of early Christian art curiously exhibit the progress of this perversion. They show how Mariolatry grew up. The first pictures of the early Christian ages simply represent the woman. By and by, we find outlines of the Mother and the Child. In an after-age, the Son is seen sitting on a throne, with the Mother crowned, but sitting as yet below Him. In an age still later, the crowned Mother on a level with the Son. Later still, the Mother on a throne above the Son. And lastly, a Romish picture represents the Eternal Son in wrath, about to destroy the Earth, and the Virgin Intercessor, interposing, pleading by significant attitude her maternal rights, and redeeming the world from His vengeance. Such was in fact, the progress of Virgin-worship. First the woman revered for the Son's sake; then the woman revered above the Son and adored.

Now the question is, How came this to be? for we assume it as a principle that no error has ever spread widely, that was not the exaggeration or perversion of a truth. And be assured that the first step towards dislodging error is to understand the truth at which it aims. Never can an error be permanently destroyed by the roots, unless we have planted by its side the truth that is to take its place. Else you will find the falsehood returning for ever, growing up again when you thought it cut up root and branch, appearing in the very places where the crushing of it seemed most complete. Wherever there is a deep truth unrecognised, misunderstood, it will force its way into men's hearts. It will take pernicious forms if it cannot find healthful ones. It will grow as some weeds grow, in noxious forms, ineradicably, because it has a root in human nature.

Else how came it to pass, after three hundred years of Reformation, we find Virgin-worship restoring itself again in this reformed England, where least of all countries we should expect it, and where the remembrance of Romish persecution might have seemed to make its return impossible? How comes it that some of the deepest thinkers of our day, and men of the saintliest lives, are feeling this Virgin-

worship a necessity for their souls ; for it is *the* doctrine to which the converts to Romanism cling most tenaciously ?

Brethren, I reply, Because ~~the~~ doctrine of the worship of the Virgin has a root in truth, and no mere cutting and uprooting can destroy it : no thunders of Protestant oratory : no platform expositions : no Reformation societies. In one word, no mere negations ; nothing but the full liberation of the truth which lies at the root of error can eradicate error.

Surely we ought to have learnt that ~~t~~uth by this time. Recollect how, before Christ's time, mere negations failed to uproot paganism. Philosophers had disproved it by argument : satirists had covered it with ridicule. It was slain a thousand times, and yet paganism lived on in the hearts of men : and those who gave it up returned to it again in a dying hour, because the disproofs of it had given nothing for the heart to rest on in its place. But when Paul dared to proclaim of paganism what we are proclaiming of Virgin-worship, that paganism stood upon a truth, and taught that truth, paganism fell for ever. The Apostle Paul found in Athens an altar to the Unknown God. He did not announce in Athens lectures against heathen priestcraft ; nor did he undertake to prove it, in the Arcopagus, all a mystery of iniquity, and a system of damnable idolatries ;—that is the mode in which we set about *our* controversies—but he disengaged the truth from the error, proclaimed the truth, and left the errors to themselves. The truth grew up, and the errors silently and slowly withered.

I pray you, Christian brethren, do not join those fierce associations which think only of uprooting error. There is a spirit in them which is more of earth than heaven, short-sighted too and self-destructive. They do not make converts to Christ, but only controversialists, and adherents to a party. They compass sea and land. It matters little whether fierce Romanism or fierce Protestantism wins the day : but it does matter whether or not in the conflict we lose some precious Christian truth, as well as the very spirit of Christianity.

The Glory of the Virgin Mother 223

What lies at the root of this ineradicable Virgin-worship? How comes it that out of so few scripture sentences about her, many of them like this rebuke, depreciatory, learned men and pious men could ever have *developed*, as they call it, or as it seems to us, tortured and twisted a doctrine of Divine honours to be paid to Mary? Let us set out with the conviction that there must have been some reason for it, some truth of which it is the perversion.

I believe the truth to be this. Before Christ the qualities honoured as Divine were peculiarly the virtues of the man; Courage—Wisdom—Truth—Strength. But Christ proclaimed the Divine nature of qualities entirely opposite: Meekness—Obedience—Affection—Purity. He said that the pure in heart should see God. He pronounced the beatitudes of meekness, and lowliness, and poverty of spirit. Now observe these were all of the order of graces which are distinctively feminine. And it is the peculiar feature of Christianity that it exalts not strength nor intellect, but gentleness, and lovingness, and Virgin purity.

Here was a new strange thought given to the world. It was for many ages *the* thought: no wonder—it was the one great novelty of the revealed religion. How were men to find expression for that idea which was working in them, vague and beautiful, but wanting substance? the idea of the Divineness of what is pure, above the Divineness of what is strong? Would you have had them say simply, we had forgotten these things; now they are revealed—now we know that Love and Purity are as Divine as Power and Reason? My brethren, it is not so that men *worship*—it is only so that men *think*. They think about qualities—they worship persons. Worship must have a form. Adoration finds a Person, and if it cannot find one, it will imagine one. Gentleness and purity are words for a philosopher; but a man whose heart wants something to adore will find for himself a gentle one—a pure one—Incarnate purity and love—gentleness robed in flesh and blood, before whom his knee may bend, and to whom the homage of his spirit can be given. You cannot adore except a Person. -

What marvel if the early Christian found that the Virgin-mother of our Lord embodied this great idea? What marvel if he filled out and expanded with that idea which was in his heart, the brief sketch given of her in the gospels, till his imagination had robed the woman of the Bible with the majesty of the mother of God? Can we not *feel* that it must have been so? Instead of a dry, formal dogma of theology, the Romanist presented an actual woman, endued with every inward grace and beauty, and pierced by sorrows, as a living object of devotion, faith, and hope—a personality instead of an abstraction. Historically speaking, it seems inevitable that the idea could scarcely have been expressed to the world except through an idolatry.

Brethren, it is an idolatry: in modern Romanism a pernicious and most defiling one. The worship of Mary overshadows the worship of the Son. The love given to her is so much taken from Him. Nevertheless let us not hide from ourselves the eternal truth of the idea that lies beneath the temporary falsehood of the dogma. Overthrow the idolatry; but do it by substituting the truth.

Now the truth which alone can supplant the worship of the Virgin is the perfect humanity of Jesus Christ. I say the perfect *humanity*: for perfect manhood is a very ambiguous expression. By Man we sometimes mean the human race, made up of man and woman, and sometimes we only mean the masculine sex. We have only one word to express both ideas. The language in which the New Testament was written has two. Hence we may make a great mistake. When the Bible speaks of man the human being, we may think that it means man the male creature. When the Bible tells us Jesus Christ was the Son of Man, it uses the word which implies human being: it does not use the word which signifies one of the male sex: it does not dwell on the fact that He was *a* man: but it earnestly asserts that He was Man. Son of a man He was not. Son of Man He was: for the blood as it were, of all the race was in His veins.

Now let us see what is implied in this expression Son of

The Glory of the Virgin Mother 225

Man. It contains in it the doctrine of the Incarnation: it means the full humanity of Christ. Lately I tried to bring out one portion of its meaning. I said that He belonged to no particular age, but to every age. He had not the qualities of one clime or race, but that which is common to all climes and all races. He was not the Son of the Jew, nor the Son of the Oriental—He was the Son of Man. He was not the villager of Bethlehem: nor one whose character and mind were the result of a certain training, peculiar to Judea, or peculiar to that century— but He was *the Man*. This is what St. Paul insists on, when he says that in Him there is neither Jew nor Gentile, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free. A Humanity in which there is nothing distinctive, limited, or peculiar, but universal—your nature and mine, the Humanity in which we are all brothers, bond or free. Now in that same passage St. Paul uses another very remarkable expression: There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female.” That is the other thing implied in His title to the Son of Man. His nature had in it the nature of all nations: but also His heart had in it the blended qualities of both sexes. Our humanity is a whole made up of two opposite poles of character—the manly and the feminine. In the character of Christ neither was found exclusively, but both in perfect balance. He was the Son of Man—the human being—perfect Man.

There was in Him the woman-heart as well as the manly brain—all that was most manly, and all that was most womanly. Remember what He was in life: recollect His stern iron hardness in the temptation of the desert: recollect the calmness that never quailed in all the uproars of the people, the truth that never paltered, the strict severe integrity which characterized the Witness of the Truth: recollect the justice that never gave way to weak feeling—which let the rich young ruler go his way to perish if he would—which paid the tribute-money—which held the balance fair between the persecuted woman and her accuser, but did not suffer itself to be betrayed by sympathy into any

feeble tenderness—the justice that rebuked Peter with indignation, and pronounced the doom of Jerusalem unswervingly. Here is one side or pole of human character—surely not the feminine side. Now look at the other. Recollect the twice recorded tears, which a man would have been ashamed to show, and which are never beautiful in man except when joined with strength like His: and recollect the sympathy craved and yearned for as well as given—the shrinking from solitude in prayer—the trembling of a sorrow unto death—the considerate care which provided bread for the multitude, and said to the ~~few~~ ^{four} disciples, as with a sister's rather than a brother's thoughtfulness, "Come ye apart into the desert and rest awhile." This is the other side or pole of human character—surely not the masculine.

When we have learnt and felt what is meant by Divine Humanity in Christ, and when we have believed it, not in a onesided way, but in all its fulness, then we are safe from Mariolatry,—because we do not want it: we have the truth which Mariolatry labours to express, and, labouring ignorance, falls into idolatry. But so long as the male was looked upon as the only type of God, and the masculine virtues as the only glory of His character, so long the truth was yet unrevealed. This was the state of heathenism, And so long as Christ was only felt as the Divine Man, and not the Divine Humanity, so long the world had only a onesided truth.

One-half of our nature, the sterner portion of it, only was felt to be of God and in God. The other half, the tenderer and the purer qualities of our souls, were felt as earthly. This was the state of Romanism from which men tried to escape by Mariolatry. And if men had not learned that this side of our nature too, was made Divine in Christ, what possible escape was there for them, but to look to the Virgin Mary as the Incarnation of the purer and lovelier elements of God's character, reserving to her Son the sterner and the more masculine?

Can we not understand too, how it came to pass that the mother was placed above the Son, and addresd more?

The Glory of the Virgin Mother 227

Christianity had proclaimed Meekness, Purity, Obedience, as more Divine than Strength and Wisdom. What wonder if she who was gazed on as the type of Purity should be reckoned more near to God than He who had come through misconception to be looked on chiefly as the type of Strength and Justice?

There is a spirit abroad which is leading men to Rome. Do not call that the spirit of the Devil. It is the desire and hope to find there in its tenderness, and its beauty, and its devotion, a home for those feelings of awe, and contemplation, and love for which our stern Protestantism finds no shelter. Let us acknowledge that what they worship is indeed deserving of all adoration: only let us say that *what* they worship is, ignorantly, Christ. Whom they ignorantly worship let us declare unto them: Christ their unknown God, worshipped at an idol-altar. Do not let us satisfy ourselves by saying as a watchword, "Christ not Mary:" say rather, "In Christ all that they find in Mary." The Mother in the Son, the womanly in the Soul of Christ. Divine Honour to the Feminine side of His character, joyful and unvarying acknowledgment that in Christ there is a revelation of the Divineness of submission, and love, and purity, and long-suffering, just as there was before in the name of the Lord of Hosts, a revelation of the Divineness of courage, and strength, and heroism, and manliness.

Therefore it is we do not sympathize with those coarse expositions which aim at doing exclusive honour to the Son of God by degrading the life and character of the Virgin. Just as the Romanist has loved to represent all connected with her as mysterious and immaculate, so has the Protestant been disposed to vulgarize her to the level of the commonest humanity, and exaggerate into rebukes the reverent expressions to her in which Jesus merely asserted His Divine independence.

Rather reverence, not her, but that Idea and type which Christianity has given in her—the type of Christian womanhood; which was not realized in her—which never was and never will be realized in one single woman—which remains.

ever a Divine Idea, after which each living woman is to strive.

And when I say reverence that Idea or type, I am but pointing to the relation between the Mother and the Son, and asking men to reverence that which He revered. Think we that there is no meaning hidden in the mystery that the Son of God was the Virgin's Son? To Him through life there remained the early recollections of a pure mother. Blessed beyond all common blessedness is the man who can look back to that. God has given to him a talisman which will carry him triumphant through many a temptation. To other men purity may be a name; to him it has been once a reality. "Faith in all things high beats with his blood." He may be tempted: he may err: but there will be a light from home shining for ever on his path inextinguishably. By the grace of God, degraded he cannot be.

THE FIRST MIRACLE

II. THE GLORY OF THE DIVINE SON

JOHN ii. 11.—"This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him."

IN the history of this miracle, two personages are brought prominently before our notice. One is the Virgin Mary; the other is the Son of God. And these two exhibit different orders of glory, as well as different degrees. Different degrees, for the Virgin was only human: her Son was God manifest in the flesh. Different orders of glory, for the one exhibited the distinctive glory of womanhood: the Other manifested forth *His* glory—the glory of perfect manhood.

Taking the Virgin as the type and representative of her sex, we found the glory of womanhood, as exhibited by her conduct in this parable, to consist in unselfish consideration about others, in delicacy of tact, in the power of

The Glory of the Divine Son 229

ennobling a ministry of coarse and household things, like the wine of the marriage-feast, by the sanctity of affection: in meekness, and lowly obedience, which was in the Fall her curse, in Christ become her glory, transformed into a blessing and a power: and lastly, as the name Virgin implies, the distinctive glory of womanhood we found to consist in purity.

Now the Christian history first revealed these great truths. The gospels which record the life of Christ, first, in the history of the world, brought to light the Divine glory of those qualities which had been despised. Before Christ came, the heathen had counted for divine the legislative wisdom of the man, manly strength, manly truth, manly justice, manly courage. The Life and the Cross of Christ shed a splendour from heaven upon a new and till then unheard-of order of heroism—that which may be called the feminine order, meekness, endurance, long-suffering, the passive strength of martyrdom. For Christianity does not say Honour to the Wise, but “Blessed are the Meek.” Not Glory to the Strong, but, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” Not The Lord is a man of war, Jehovah is His name, but “God is Love.” In Christ not intellect, but love is consecrated. In Christ is magnified not force of will, but the Glory of a Divine humility. “He was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross: *wherefore* God also hath highly exalted Him.”

Therefore it was, that from that time forward womanhood assumed a new place in this world. She in whom these qualities, for the first time declared Divine in Christ, were the distinctive characteristics, steadily and gradually rose to a higher dignity in human life. It is not a mere civilisation, but to the Spirit of life in Christ, that woman owes all she has, and all she has yet to gain.

Now the outward phases in which this Redemption of the sex appeared to the world have been as yet chiefly three. There have been three ages through which these great truths of the Divineness of purity, and the strength and glory of obedience, the peculiar characteristics of womanhood, have

been rising into their right acknowledgment. 1. The ages of Virgin-worship. 2. The ages of Chivalry. 3. The age of the three last centuries. Now during these three Protestant centuries, the place and destinies of womanhood have been every year rising more and more into great questions. Her mission, as it is called in the cant language of the day—what it is—that is one of the subjects of deepest interest in the controversies of the day. And unless we are prepared to say that the truth which has been growing clearer and brighter for eighteen centuries shall stop now exactly where it is, and grow no clearer: unless we are ready to affirm that mankind will never learn to pay less glory to strength and intellect, and more to meekness, and humbleness, and pureness than they do now, it follows that God has yet reserved for womanhood a larger and more glorious field for her peculiar qualities and gifts, and that the truth contained in the Virgin's motherhood is unexhausted still.

For this reason, in reference to that womanhood and its destinies, of which St. Mary is the type, I thought it needful last Sunday to insist on two things as of profound importance.

I. To declare in what her true glory consists. The only glory of the Virgin was the glory of true womanhood. The glory of true womanhood consists in being herself: not in striving to be something else. It is the false paradox and heresy of this present age to claim for her as a glory the right to leave her sphere. Her glory lies *in* her sphere, and God has given her a sphere distinct; as in the Epistle to the church of Corinth, when in that wise chapter St. Paul rendered unto womanhood the things that were woman's, and unto manhood the things which were man's.

And the true correction of that monstrous rebellion against what is natural, lies in vindicating Mary's glory, on the one side, from the Romanist, who gives to her the glory of God; and on the other, from those who would confound the distinctive glories of the two sexes, and claim as the glory of woman what is in the deeps of nature, the glory of the man.

The Glory of the Divine Son 231

Everything is created in its own order. Every created thing has its own glory. "There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory." There is one glory of Manhood, and another glory of Womanhood. And the glory of each created thing consists in being true to its own nature, and moving in its own sphere.

Mary's glory was not immaculate origin, nor immaculate life, nor exaltation to Divine honours. She had none of these things. Nor on the other hand, was it Force or demanded Right, social or domestic, that constituted her glory. But it was the glory of simple Womanhood; the glory of being true to the nature assigned her by her Maker; the glory of motherhood; the glory of a "meek and quiet spirit, which in the sight of God is of great price." She was not the Queen of Heaven, but she was something nobler still, a creature content to be what God had made her: in unselfishness, and humbleness, and purity, rejoicing in God her Saviour, content that, He had regarded the lowliness of His handmaiden.

The second thing upon which I insisted was, that the only safeguard against the idolatrous error of Virgin-worship, is a full recognition of the perfect Humanity of Christ. *A full* recognition: for it is only a partial acknowledgment of the meaning of the Incarnation when we think of Him as the Divine Man. It was not manhood, but Humanity, that was made Divine in Him. Humanity has its two sides: one side in the strength and intellect of manhood; the other in the tenderness, and faith, and submissiveness of womanhood: Man and Woman, not man alone, make up human nature. In Christ not one alone but both were glorified. Strength and Grace—Wisdom and Love—Courage and Purity—Divine Manliness: Divine Womanliness. In all noble characters you find the two blended: in Him—the noblest—blended into one entire and perfect Humanity.

Unless you recognise and fully utter this whole truth, you will find Mariolatry for ever returning, cast it down as you will. It must come back. It will come back. I had well

nigh said it *ought* to come back, unless we preach and believe the full truth of God incarnate in Humanity. For while we teach in our classical schools as the only manliness, Pagan heroism of warrior and legislator, can we say that we are teaching both sides of Christ? Our souls were trained in boyhood to honour the heroic and the masculine. Who ever hinted to us that charity is the "more excellent way"? Who suggested that "he which ruleth his spirit is greater, than he which taketh a city"?

Again we find our English society divided into two sections: one the men of business and action, exhibiting prominently the masculine virtues of English character, truth and honour, and almost taught to reckon forbearance and feeling as proofs of weakness; taught in the playground to believe that a chaste life is romance; false sentiment and strengthlessness of character taught there: and in after-life, that it is mean to forgive a personal affront.

The other section of our society is made up of men of prayer and religiousness: for some reason or other singularly deficient in masculine breadth and strength, and even truthfulness of character: with no firm footing upon reality, not daring to look the real problems of social and political life in the face, but wasting their strength in disputes of words, or shrinking into a dim atmosphere of ecclesiastical dreaminess, unreal and effeminate. Dare we say that the full Humanity of Christ in its double aspect is practically adored amongst us? Have we not made a fatal separation between the manly and the feminine sides of character: between the moral and the devout? so that we have men who are masculine and moral, and also men who are effeminate and devout. But where are our Christian men in whom the whole Christ is formed, all that is brave, and true and wise, and at the same time all that is tender, and devout, and pure? Who ever taught us to adore in Christ all that is most manly, and all that is most womanly, that we might strive to be such in our degree ourselves? And if not, can you wonder that men, feeling their Christianity imperfect, blindly strive to patch it up through Mariolatry?

The Glory of the Divine Son 233

I gather into a few sentences the substance of what was said last Sunday. I said that Christianity exhibited the Divine glory of the weaker elements of our human nature. Heathenism, nay, even Judaism, had as yet before Him only recognised the glory of the stronger and masculine. Now the Romanist personified the masculine side of human nature in Christ. He personified gentleness and purity, the feminine side of human nature in the Virgin Mary. No wonder that with this cardinal error at the outset in his conceptions, he adored ; and no wonder since Christianity declared meekness, and purity more Divine than strength and intellect, in process of time he came to honour the Virgin more than Christ. That I believe is the true history and account of Virgin-worship.

The Bible personifies both sides of human nature, the masculine and feminine of character in Christ, of whom St. Paul declares in the Epistle to the Galatians, "In Him is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female." Neither *distinctively*, for in Him both the manly and the womanly sides of character divinely meet. I say therefore, that the Incarnation of God in Christ is the true defence against Virgin-worship.

Think of Christ only as the masculine character, glorified by the union of Godhead with it, and your Christianity has in it an awful gap, a void, a want—the inevitable supply and relief to which will be Mariolatry, however secure you may think yourself ; however strong and fierce the language you now use. Men who have used language as strong and fierce have become idolaters of Mary. With a half-thought of Christ, safe you are not. But think of Him as the Divine Human Being, in whom both sides of our double being are divine and glorified, and then you have the truth which Romanism has marred, and perverted into an idolatry pernicious in all ; in the less spiritual worshippers sensualizing and debasing.

Now there are two ways of meeting error. The one is that in which, in humble imitation of Christ and His apostles, I have tried to show you the error of the worship of Mary—

to discern the truth out of which the error sprung, firmly asserting the truth, forbearing threatening ; certain that he in whose mind the truth has lodged, has in that truth the safeguard against error.

The other way of meeting error is to overwhelm it with threats. To some men it seems the only way in which true zeal is shown. Well—it is very easy, requiring no self-control, but only an indulgence of every bad passion. It is very easy to call Rome the mother of harlots and abominations—very easy to use strong language about damnable idolatries—very easy for the apostles to call down fire from heaven upon the Samaritans because they would not receive Christ, and then to flatter themselves that that was Godly zeal. But it might be well for us to remember His somewhat startling comment, “Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.” There are those who think it a surer and a safer Protestantism to use those popular watchwords. Be it so. But, with God’s blessing, that will not *I*. The majesty of truth needs other bulwarks than vulgar and cowardly vituperation. Coarse and violent language, excusable three hundred years ago by the manners of that day, was bold and brave in the lips of the Reformers, with whom the struggle was one of life and death, and who might be called to pay the penalty of their bold defiance with their blood. But the same fierceness of language now, when there is no personal risk in the use of it, in the midst of hundreds of men and women ready to applaud and honour violence as zeal, is simply a dastardliness from ‘which every generous mind shrinks. You do not get the Reformers’ spirit by putting on the armour they have done with, but by risking the dangers which those noble warriors risked. It is not their big words, but their large, brave heart, that makes the Protestant. Oh, be sure that he whose soul has anchored itself to rest on the deep calm sea of Truth, does not spend his strength in raving against those who are still tossed by the winds of error. Spasmodic violence of words is one thing, strength of conviction is another.

‘When, oh when, shall we learn that loyalty to Christ is

The Glory of the Divine Son 235

tested far more by the strength of our Sympathy with Truth than by the intensity of our hatred of Error? I will tell you what to hate. Hate Hypocrisy—hate Cant—hate intolerance, oppression, injustice—hate Pharisaism—hate them as Christ hated them, with a deep, living, God-like hatred. But do not hate *men* in intellectual error. To hate a man for his errors is as unwise as to hate one who in casting up an account has made an error against himself. The Romanist has made an error against himself. He has missed the full glory of his Lord and Master. Well—shall we hate him, and curse, and rant, and thunder at him? Or, shall we sit down beside him, and try to sympathize with him, and see things from his point of view, and strive to understand the truth which his soul is aiming at, and seize the truth for him and for ourselves, “meekly instructing those who oppose themselves?”

Our subject to-day is the glory of the Divine Son. In that miracle “He manifested forth His glory.” Concerning that glory we say :—

1. The glory of Christ did not *begin* with that miracle : the miracle only *manifested* it. For thirty years the wonder-working power had been in Him. It was not Diviner power when it broke forth into visible manifestation, than it had been when it was unsuspected and unseen. It had been exercised up to this time in common acts of youthful life : obedience to His mother, love to His brethren. Well, it was just as Divine in those simple, daily acts, as when it showed itself in a way startling and wonderful. It was just as much the life of God on Earth when He did an act of ordinary human love or human duty, as when He did an extraordinary act, such as turning water into wine. God was as much, nay more, in the daily life and love of Christ, than He was in Christ’s miracles. The miracle only made the hidden glory visible. The extraordinary only proved that the ordinary was Divine. That was the very object of the miracle. It was done to *manifest forth* His glory. And if, instead of rousing men to see the real glory of Christ in His other life, the miracle merely fastened men’s attention on itself, and made them think that the only Glory which is Divine is to

be found in what is wonderful and uncommon, then the whole intention of the miracle was lost.

Let us make this more plain by an illustration. To the wise man, the lightning only manifests the electric force which is everywhere, and which for one moment has become visible. As often as he sees it, it reminds him that the lightning slumbers invisibly in the dew-drop, and in the mist, and in the cloud, and binds together every atom of the water that he uses in daily life. But to the vulgar mind the lightning is something unique, a something which has no existence but when it appears. There is a fearful glory in the lightning because he sees it. But there is no startling glory and nothing fearful in the drop of dew, because he does not know, what the Thinker knows, that the flash is there in all its terrors.

So, in the same way, to the half-believer a miracle is the one solitary evidence of God. Without it he could have no certainty of God's existence.

But to the true disciple a miracle only *manifests* the Power and Love which are silently at work everywhere—as truly and as really in the slow work of the cure of the insane, as in the sudden expulsion of the legion from the demoniac—as divinely in the gift of daily bread, as in the miraculous multiplication of the loaves. God's glory is at work in the growth of the vine and the ripening of the grape, and the process by which grape-juice passes into wine. It is not *more* glory, but only glory more *manifested*, when water at His bidding passes at once into wine. And be sure that if you do not feel as David felt, God's presence in the annual miracle, that it is *God*, which in the vintage of every year causeth wine to make glad the heart of man, the sudden miracle at Capernaum would not have given you conviction of His presence. "If you hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will you be persuaded though one rose from the dead." Miracles have only done their work when they teach us the glory and the awfulness that surround our common life. In a miracle, God for one moment shows Himself, that we may remember it is He that is at work when no miracle is seen.

The Glory of the Divine Son · 237

Now this is the deep truth of miracles which most men miss. They believe that the life of Jesus was Divine, because He wrought miracles. But if their faith in miracles were shaken, their faith in Christ would go. If the evidence for the credibility of those miracles were weakened, then to them the mystic glory would have faded off His history. They could not be sure that His Existence was Divine. That love, even unto death, would bear no certain stamp of God upon it. That life of long self-sacrifice would have had in it no certain unquestionable traces of the Son of God. See what that implies. If that be true, and miracles are the best proof of Christ's mission, God can be recognised only in what is marvellous: God cannot be recognised in what is good. It is by Divine power that a human Being turns water into wine. It is by power, less certainly Divine than the same Being witnesses to truth—forgives His enemies—makes it His meat and drink to do His Father's will, and finishes His work. We are more sure that God was in Christ when He said, "Rise up, and walk," than when He said with absolving love, "Son, thy sins be forgiven thee:" more certain when He furnished wine for wedding guests, than when He said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Oh, a strange, and low, and vulgar appreciation this of the true glory of the Son of God, the same false conception that runs through all our life, appearing in every form—God in the storm, and the earthquake, and the fire—no God in the still small voice. Glory in the lightning-flash—no glory and no God in the lowliness of the dew-drop. Glory to intellect and genius—no glory to gentleness and patience. Glory to every kind of *power*—none to the inward, invisible strength of the life of God in the soul of man.

"An evil and an adulterous generation seeketh after a sign." Look at the feverish eagerness with which men crowd to every exhibition of some newly-discovered Force, real or pretended. What lies at the bottom of this feverishness but an unbelieving craving after signs? some wonder which is to show them the Divine life of which the evidence

is yet imperfect? As if the bread they eat and the wine they drink, chosen by God for the emblems of His sacraments because the commonest things of daily life, were not filled with the Presence of His love; as if God were not around their path and beside their bed, and spying out all their daily ways.

It is in this strange way that we have learned Christ. The miracles which were meant to point us to the Divinity of His Goodness, have only dazzled us with the splendour of their Power. We have forgotten what His first wonder-work shows, that a miracle is only *manifested* glory.

2. It was the glory of Christ again to sanctify, *i. e.* declare the sacredness of, all things natural. All natural relationships—all natural enjoyments.

All natural relationships. What He sanctified by His presence was a marriage. Now remember what had gone before this. The life of John the Baptist was the highest form of religious life known in Israel. It was the life ascetic. It was a life of solitariness and penitential austerity. He drank no wine: he ate no pleasant food: he married no wife: he entered into no human relationship. It was the law of that stern and in its way sublime life, to cut out every human feeling as a weakness, and to mortify every natural instinct, in order to cultivate an intenser spirituality. A life in its own order grand, but indisputably unnatural.

Now the first public act of our Redeemer's life is to go with His disciples to a marriage. He consecrates marriage, and the sympathies which lead to marriage. He declares the sacredness of feelings which had been reckoned carnal, and low, and human. He stamped His image on human joys, human connexions, human relationships. He pronounces that they are more than human—as it were, sacramental: the means whereby God's presence comes to us; the types and shadows whereby higher and deeper relationships become possible to us. For it is through our human affections that the soul first learns to feel that its destiny is Divine: It is through a mortal yearning, unsatisfied, that

The Glory of the Divine Son : 239

the spirit ascends, seeking a higher object : It is through the gush of our human tenderness that the Immortal and the Infinite in us reveals itself. Never does a man know the force that is in him till some mighty affection or grief has humanized the soul. It is by an earthly relationship that God has typified to us and helped us to conceive the only true Espousal—the marriage of the soul to her Eternal Lord.

It was the glory of Christianity to pronounce all these human feelings sacred : therefore it is that the church asserts their sacredness in a religious ceremony ; for example, that of marriage. Do not mistake. It is not the ceremony that makes a thing religious : a ceremony can only *declare* a thing religious. The church cannot make sacred that which is not sacred : she is but here on earth as the moon, the witness of the light in heaven ; by her ceremonies and by her institutions to bear witness to eternal truths. She cannot by her manipulations manufacture a child of the devil, through baptism, into a child of God : she can only authoritatively declare the sublime truth—he is *not* the devil's child, but God's child by right. She cannot make the bond of marriage sacred and indissoluble : she can only witness to the sacredness of that which the union of two spirits has already made : and such are her own words. Her minister is commanded by her to say—"Forasmuch as these two persons have *consented together*," there is the sacred Fact of Nature, "I pronounce that they be man and wife"—here is the authoritative witness to the fact.

Again, it was His glory to declare the sacredness of all natural enjoyments.

It was not a marriage only, but a marriage-feast, to which Christ conducted His disciples. Now we cannot get over this plain fact by saying that it was a religious ceremony : that would be mere sophistry. It was an indulgence in the festivity of life ; as plainly as words can describe here was a banquet of human enjoyment. The very language of the master of the feast about men who had well drunk, tells us that there had been, not excess of course, but happiness there and merry-making.

Neither can we explain away the lesson by saying that it is no example to us, for Christ was there to do good, and that what was safe for Him might be unsafe for us. For if His life is no pattern for us here in this case of accepting an invitation, in what can we be sure it *is* a pattern? Besides, He took His disciples there, and His mother was there: they were not shielded as he was, by immaculate purity. He was there as a guest at first, as Messiah only afterwards: thereby He declared the sacredness of natural enjoyments.

Here again, then, Christ manifested His peculiar glory. The Temptation of the Wilderness was past: the baptism of John, and the life of abstinence to which it introduced, were over; and now the Bridegroom comes before the world in the true glory of Messiah—not in the life of asceticism, but in the life of Godliness—not separating from life, but consecrating it; carrying a Divine spirit into every simplest act—accepting an invitation to a feast—giving to water the virtue of a nobler beverage. For Christianity does not destroy what is natural, but ennobles it. To turn water into wine, and what is common into what is holy, is indeed the glory of Christianity.

The ascetic life of abstinence, of fasting, austerity, singularity, is the lower and earthlier form of religion. The life of Godliness is the glory of Christ. It is a thing far more striking to the vulgar imagination to be religious after the type and pattern of John the Baptist—to fast—to mortify every inclination—to be found at no feast—to wrap ourselves in solitariness, and abstain from all social joys: yes, and far *easier* so to live, and far *easier* so to win a character for religiousness. A silent man is easily reputed wise. A man who suffers none to see him in the common jostle and undress of life, easily gathers round him a mysterious veil of unknown sanctity, and men honour him for a saint. The unknown is always wonderful. But the life of Him whom men called a gluttonous man and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners, was a far harder and a far heavenlier religion. To shroud ourselves in no false mist of holiness: to dare to show ourselves as we are, making no solemn affecta-

tion of reserve or difference from others : to be found at the marriage-feast : to accept the invitation of the rich Pharisee Simon, and the scorned publican Zaccheus : to mix with the crowd of men, using not affected singularity, content to be creatures not too bright or good for human nature's daily food : and yet for a man amidst it all to remain a consecrated spirit, His trials and His solitariness known only to His Father—a being set apart, not *of* this world, alone in the heart's deeps with God : to put the cup of this world's gladness to his lips, and yet be unintoxicated : to gaze steadily on all its grandeur, and yet be undazzled, plain and simple in personal desires : to feel its brightness, and yet defy its thrall :—this is the difficult, and rare, and glorious life of God in the Soul of Man. This, this was the peculiar glory of the life of Christ, which was manifested in that first miracle which Jesus wrought at the marriage-feast in Cana of Galilee.

TRIUMPH OVER HINDRANCES.—ZACCHEUS

LUKE xix. 8.—“And Zaccheus stood, and said unto the Lord, Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor ; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.”

THERE are persons to whom a religious life seems smooth and easy. Gifted by God constitutionally with a freedom from those inclinations which in other men are tyrannous and irresistible—endued with those aspirations which other men seem to lack—it appears as if they were born saints.

There are others to whom it is all a trial—a whole world of passions keep up strife within. The name of the Spirit which possesses them is Legion. It is a hard fight from the cradle to the grave—up-hill work—toil all the way ; and at the last it seems as if they had only just kept their ground.

There are circumstances which seem as if intended as a very hotbed for the culture of religious principle, in which the difficulty appears to be to escape being religious.

There are others in which religious life seems impossible.

242 Triumph over Hindrances

For the soul, tested by temptation, is like iron tried by weights. No iron bar is absolutely infrangible. Its strength is tested by the weight which it will bear without breaking. No soul is absolutely impeccable. It seems as if all we can dare to ask even of the holiest is how much temptation he can bear without giving way. There are societies amidst which some are forced to dwell daily, in which the very idea of Christian rest is negatived. There are occupations in which purity of heart can scarcely be conceived. There are temptations to which some are subjected in a long series, in which to have stood upright would have demanded not a man's but an angel's strength.

Here are two cases: one in which temperament and circumstances are favourable to religion; another in which both are adverse. If life were always the brighter side of these pictures, the need of Christian instruction and Christian casuistry—*i. e.* the direction for conduct under various supposable cases, would be superseded. The end of the institution of a Church would be gone; for the Church exists for the purposes of mutual sympathy and mutual support. But the fact is, life is for the most part a path of varied trial. How to lead the life divine, surrounded by temptations from within and from without—how to breathe freely the atmosphere of heaven, while the feet yet touch earth—how to lead the life of Christ, who shrunk from no scene of trying duty, and took the temptations of man's life as they came; or how even to lead the ordinary saintly life, winning experience from fall, and permanent strength out of momentary weakness, and victory out of defeat—this is the problem.

The possibility of such a life is guaranteed by the history of Zaccheus. Zaccheus was tempted much, and yet Zaccheus contrived to be a servant of Christ. If we wanted a motto to prefix to this story, we should append this—The successful pursuit of religion under difficulties.

These, then, are the two branches of our thoughts to-day.

- I. The hindrances to a religious life.
- II. The Christian triumph over difficulties.

Triumph over Hindrances 243

I. The hindrances of Zaccheus were twofold: Partly circumstantial — partly personal. Partly circumstantial, arising from his riches and his profession of a publican.

Now the publican's profession exposed him to temptations in these three ways. First of all in the way of *opportunity*. A publican was a gatherer of the Roman public imposts. Not however, as now, when all is fixed, and the government pays the gatherer of the taxes. The Roman publican paid so much to the government for the privilege of collecting them; and then indemnified himself, and appropriated what overplus he could, from the taxes which he gathered. There was therefore evidently a temptation to overcharge, and a temptation to oppress. To overcharge, because the only redress the payer of the taxes had was an appeal to law, in which his chance was small before a tribunal where the judge was a Roman, and the accused an official of the Roman government. A temptation to oppress, because the threat of law was nearly certain to extort a bribe. Besides this, most of us must have remarked that a certain harshness of manner is contracted by those who have the rule over the poor. They come in contact with human souls only in the way of business. They have to do with their ignorance, their stupidity, their attempts to deceive; and hence the tenderest-hearted men become impatient and apparently unfeeling. Hard men, knowing that redress is difficult, become harder still, and exercise their authority with the insolence of office; so that, when to the insolence of office and the likelihood of impunity there was superadded the pecuniary advantage annexed to tyrannical extortion, any one may understand how great the publican's temptation was.

Another temptation was presented: to live satisfied with a low morality. The standard of right and wrong is eternal in the heavens—unchangeably one and the same. But here on earth it is perpetually variable—it is one in one age or nation, another in another. Every profession has its conventional morality, current nowhere else. That which is permitted by the peculiar standard of truth acknowledged at

244 Triumph over Hindrances

the bar, is falsehood among plain men—that which would be reckoned in the army purity and tenderness, would be elsewhere licentiousness and cruelty. There is a parliamentary honour quite distinct from honour between man and man. Trade has its honesty; which rightly named is fraud. And in all these cases the temptation is to live content with the standard of a man's own profession or society; and this is the real difference between the worldly man and the religious man. He is the worldling who lives below that standard, or no higher—he is the servant of God who lives above his age. But you will perceive, that amongst publicans a very little would count much—that which would be laxity to a Jew, and shame to a Pharisee, might be reckoned very strict morality among the Publicans.

Again, Zaccheus was tempted to that hardness in evil which comes from having no character to support. But the extent to which sin hardens depends partly on the estimate taken of it by society. The falsehood of Abraham, the guilt and violence of David, were very different in their effect on character in an age when truth and purity and gentleness were scarcely recognised, from what they would be now. Then, Abraham and David had not so sinned against their conscience as a man would sin now in doing the same acts, because their consciences were less enlightened. A man might be a slave-trader in the Western hemisphere, and in other respects a humane, upright, honourable man. In the last century, the holy Newton of Olney trafficked in slaves, after becoming religious. A man who had dealings in this way in this country could not remain upright and honourable, even if it were conceivable that he began as such; because he would either conceal from the world his share in the traffic, and so doing it secretly, would become a hypocrite; or else he must cover his wickedness by effrontery, doing it in defiance of public shame, and so getting seared in conscience. Because in the one case, the sin, remaining sin, yet countenanced by society, does not degrade the man, nor injure his conscience, even to the same extent to which it would ruin the other, whose conscience must become

seared by defiance of public shame. It is scarcely possible to unite together the idea o' an executioner of public justice and a humble holy man. And yet assuredly, not from anything that there is unlawful in the office : an executioner's trade is as lawful as a soldier's. A soldier is placed there by his country to slay his country's enemies ; and a doomster is placed there to slay the transgressors of his country's laws. Wherein lies the difference which leaves the one a man of honour, and almost necessitates the other to be taken from the rank of reprobates, or else gradually to become such ? Simply the difference of public opinion—public scorn. Once there was no shame in the office of the executioner, and the Judge of Israel, with his own hands, hewed Agag to pieces before the Lord in Gilgal. Phinehas executed summary and sanguinary vengeance, and his name has been preserved in a hymn by his country's gratitude. The whole congregation became executioners in the case of blasphemy, and no abandonment was the result. But the voice of public opinion pronouncing an office or a man scandalous, either finds or else makes them what it has pronounced them. The executioner is or becomes an outcast, because reckoned such.

More vile and more degraded than even the executioner's office with us, was the office of publican among the Jews. A penitent publican could not go to the house of God without the risk of hearing muttered near him the sanctimonious thanksgiving of Pharisaism : " God, I thank Thee that I am not as this publican." A publican, even though high in office, and rich besides, could not receive into his house a Teacher of religion without being saluted by the murmurs of the crowd, as in this case : " He is gone to eat with a man that is a sinner." A sinner ! The proof of that ? The only proof was that he *was* a publican. There are men and women in this congregation who have committed sins that never have been published to the world ; and therefore, though they be still untouched by the love of God, they have never sunk down to degradation ; whereas the very same sins, branded with public shame, have sunk others not worse than them down to the lowest infamy. There is no principle in

246 Triumph over Hindrances

education and in life more sure than this—to stigmatize is to ruin : to take away character is to take away all. There is no power committed to man, capable of use and abuse, more certain and more awful than this : “ Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them. ”

This, then, was a temptation arising out of Zaccheus’ circumstances—to become quite hardened by having no character to support.

The *personal* hindrance to a religious life lay in the recollection of past guilt. Zaccheus had done wrong, and no fourfold restitution will undo that, where only remorse exists.

There is a difference between remorse and penitence. Remorse is the consciousness of wrong-doing with no sense of love. Penitence is that same consciousness, with the feeling of tenderness and gratefulness added.

And pernicious as have been the consequences of self-righteousness, more destructive still have been the consequences of remorse. If self-righteousness has slain its thousands, remorse has slain its tens of thousands ; for indisputably self-righteousness secures a man from degradation. Have you never wondered at the sure walk of those persons who, to trust to their own estimate of themselves, are always right ? They never sin—their children are better brought up than any other children—their conduct is irreproachable. Pride saves them from a fall. That element of self-respect, healthful always, is their safeguard. Yes, the Pharisee was right. He is not an extortioner, nor unjust, and he is regular in his payments and his duties. That was self-righteousness : it kept him from saintliness ; but it saved him from degradation too. Remorse, on the contrary, crushes. If a man lose the world’s respect, he can retreat back upon the consciousness of the God within. But if a man lose his own respect, he sinks down and down, and deeper yet, until he can get it back again by feeling that he is sublimely loved, and he dares at last to respect that which God vouchsafes to care for. Remorse is like the clog of an insoluble debt. The debtor is proverbially extravagant—one more, and one more expense. What can

it matter when the great bankruptcy is near? And so, in the same way one sin, and one more. Why not? why should he pause when all is hopeless? what is one added to that which is already infinite?

Past guilt becomes a hindrance too in another way—it makes fresh sin easier. Let any one, out of a series of transgressions, compare the character of the first and the last. The first time there was the shudder and the horror, and the violent struggle, and the feeling of impossibility. I cannot—*cannot* do that. The second time there was faint reluctance, made more faint by the recollection of the facility and the pleasantness of the first transgression; and the last time there is neither shudder nor reluctance, but the eager plunge down the precipice on the brink of which he trembled once. All this was against Zaccheus. A publican had lost self-respect, and sin was therefore easy.

II. Pass we on to the triumph over difficulties. In this there is man's part, and God's part.

Man's part in Zaccheus' case was exhibited in the discovery of expedients. The Redeemer came to Jericho, and Zaccheus desired to see that blessed countenance, whose very looks, he was told, shed peace upon restless spirits and fevered hearts. But Zaccheus was small of stature, and a crowd surrounded Him. Therefore he ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore-tree. You must not look on this as a mere act of curiosity. They who thronged the steps of Jesus were a crowd formed of different materials from the crowd which would have been found in the amphitheatre. He was there as a religious Teacher or Prophet; and they who took pains to see Him, at least, were the men who looked for salvation in Israel. This, therefore, was a *religious* act.

We have heard of the "pursuit of knowledge under difficulties." The shepherd, with no apparatus besides his thread and beads, has lain on his back on the starry night, mapped the heavens, and unconsciously become a distinguished astronomer. The peasant boy, with no tools out

248 · Triumph over Hindrances

his rude knife, and a visit now and then to the neighbouring town, has begun his scientific education by producing a watch that would mark the time. The blind man, trampling upon impossibilities, has explored the economy of the beehive, and, more wondrous still, lectured on the laws of light. The timid stammerer, with pebbles in his mouth, and the roar of the sea-surge in his ear, has attained correctest elocution, and swayed as one man the changeful tides of the mighty masses of the Athenian democracy. All these were *expedients*. It is thus in the life religious. No man ever trod exactly the path that others trod before him. There is no exact chart laid down for the voyage. The rocks and quicksands are shifting; he who enters upon the ocean of existence arches his sails to an untried breeze. "He is the first that ever burst into that lonely sea." Every life is a *new* life. Every day is a *new* day—like nothing that ever went before, or can ever follow after. No books—no systems—no forecast—set of rules—can provide for all cases; every case is a new case. And just as in any earthly enterprise, the conduct of a campaign, or the building of a bridge, unforeseen difficulties and unexpected disasters must be met by that inexhaustible fertility of invention which belongs to those who do not live to God *second-hand*. We must live to God first-hand. If we are in earnest as Zaccheus was, we must invent peculiar means of getting over peculiar difficulties.

There are times when the truest courage is shown in retreating from a temptation. There are times when, ~~not~~ being on a level with other men in qualifications of temper, mind, character, we must compensate by inventions and Christian expedients. You must climb over the crowd of difficulties which stand between your soul and Christ—you must "run before" and forecast trials, and get into the sycamore solitude. Without a living life like this you will never get a glimpse of the King in His beauty: you will never see it. You will be just on the point of seeing Him, and yet be shut out by some unexpected hindrance.

Observe, again, an illustration of this, Zaccheus' habit

Triumph over Hindrances 249

of restoration. "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor ; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold " There are two ways of taking this ; it may have reference to the future. It commonly is so interpreted. It is supposed that, touched by the love of Christ, Zaccheus proclaimed this as his resolve—I hereby promise to give the half of my goods to the poor. But it is likely that this interpretation has been put upon it in order to make it square with the evangelical order of emotions. Grace first, liberality after. The interpretation seems rather put on the passage than found there. The word is not future, but singular : Behold, Lord, *I give*. And it seems more natural to take it as a statement of the habit of Zaccheus' previous life. If so, then all is plain. This man, so maligned, had been leading a righteous life after all, according to the Mosaic standard. On the day of defence he stands forward and vindicates himself from the aspersion. "These are my habits." And the Son of Man vindicates him before all. Yes, publican as he is, he too is a "son of Abraham."

Here then were *expedients* by which he overcame the hindrances of his position. The tendency to the hardness and selfishness of riches he checked by a rule of giving half away. The tendency to extortion he met by fastening on himself the recollection, that when the hot moment of temptation had passed away, he would be severely dealt with before the tribunal of his own conscience, and unrelentingly sentenced to restore fourfold.

God's part in this triumph over difficulties is exhibited in the address of Jesus : "Zaccheus, make haste and come down ; for to-day I must abide at thy house."

Two things we note here : Invitation and Sympathy. Invitation—"come down." Say what we will of Zaccheus seeking Jesus, the truth is Jesus was seeking Zaccheus. For what other reason but the will of God had Jesus come to Jericho, but to seek Zaccheus and such as he ? Long years Zaccheus had been living in only a dim consciousness of being a servant of God and goodness. At last the Saviour

250 · Triumph over Hindrances

is born into the world—appears in Judea—comes to Jericho, Zaccheus' town—passes down Zaccheus' street, and by Zaccheus' house, and up to Zaccheus' person. What is all this but seeking? what the Bible calls election? Now there is a specimen in this of the ways of God with men in this world. We do not seek God—God seeks us. There is a Spirit pervading Time and Space Who seeks the souls of men. At last the seeking becomes reciprocal—the Divine Presence is felt afar, and the soul begins to turn towards it. Then when we begin to seek God, we become conscious that God is seeking us. It is at that period that we distinguish the voice of personal invitation—"Zaccheus!" It is then that the Eternal Presence makes its abode with us, and the hour of unutterable joy begins, when the banquet of Divine Love is spread within the soul, and the Son of God abides there as at a feast. "Behold I stand at the door and knock: If any man hear my voice, I will come in and sup with him, and he with me."

This is Divine Grace. We are saved by grace, not will. "It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy." In the matter of man's salvation God is first. He comes to us self-invited—He names us by name—He isolates us from the crowd, and sheds upon us the sense of personal recognition—He pronounces the benediction, till we feel that there is a mysterious blessing on our house, and on our meal, and on our heart. This day is salvation come to this house, forasmuch as He also is a son of Abraham.

Lastly, the Divine part was done in Sympathy. By sympathy we commonly mean little more than condolence. If the tear staft readily at the voice of grief, and the purse-strings open at the accents of distress, we talk of a man's having great sympathy. To weep with those who weep:—Common sympathy does not mean much more.

The sympathy of Christ was something different from this. Sympathy to this extent, no doubt, Zaccheus could already command. If Zaccheus were sick, even a Pharisee would have given him medicine. If Zaccheus had been in

need, a Jew would not have scrupled to bestow an alms. If Zaccheus had been bereaved, many even of that crowd that murmured when they saw him treated by Christ like a son of Abraham, would have given to his sorrow the tribute of a sigh.

The sympathy of Jesus was fellow-feeling for all that is human. He did not condole with Zaccheus upon his trials,—He did not talk to him “about his soul,”—He did not preach to him about his sins,—He did not force His way into his house to lecture him,—He simply said, “I will abide at thy house:” thereby identifying himself with a publican: thereby acknowledging a publican for a brother. Zaccheus a publican? Zaccheus a sinner? Yes; but Zaccheus is a man. His heart throbs at cutting words. He has a sense of human honour. He feels the burning shame of the world’s disgrace. Lost? Yes:—but the Son of Man, with the blood of the human race in His veins, is a brother to the lost.

It is in this entire and perfect sympathy with all humanity that the heart of Jesus differs from every other heart that is found among the sons of men. And it is this—oh! it is this, which is the chief blessedness of having such a Saviour. If you are poor, you can only get a miserable sympathy from the rich; with the best intentions they cannot understand you. Their sympathy is awkward. If you are in pain, it is only a factitious and constrained sympathy you get from those in health—feelings forced, adopted kindly, but imperfect still. They sit, when the regular condolence is done, beside you, conversing on topics with each other that jar upon the ear. They sympathize? Miserable comforters are they all. If you are miserable, and tell out your grief, you have the shame of feeling that you were not understood; and that you have bared your inner self to a rude gaze. If you are in doubt, you cannot tell your doubts to religious people; no, not even to the ministers of Christ—for they have no place for doubts in their largest system. They ask, What right have you to doubt? They suspect your character. They shake the head; and whisper it about gravely, that

252 Triumph over Hindrances

you read strange books—that you are verging on infidelity. If you are depressed with guilt, to whom shall you tell out your tale of shame? The confessional, with its innumerable evils, and yet indisputably soothing power, is passed away; and there is nothing to supply its place. You cannot speak to your brother man, for you injure him by doing so, or else weaken yourself. You cannot tell it to society, for society judges in the gross by general rules, and cannot take into account the delicate differences of transgression. It banishes the frail penitent, and does homage to the daring hard transgressor.

Then it is that, repulsed on all sides and lonely, we turn to Him whose mighty Heart understands and feels all. "Lord, to whom shall we go? *Thou* hast the words of eternal life." And then it is that, exactly like Zaccheus, misunderstood, suspected by the world, suspected by our own hearts—the very voice of God apparently against us—isolated and apart, we speak to Him from the loneliness of the sycamore-tree, heart to heart, and pulse to pulse. "Lord, *Thou* knowest all things:" *Thou* knowest my secret charities, and my untold self-denials. "*Thou* knowest that I love Thee."

Remark, in conclusion, the power of this sympathy on Zaccheus' character. Salvation that day came to Zaccheus' house. What brought it? What touched him? Of course, "the gospel." Yes; but what is the gospel? What was his gospel? Speculations or revelations concerning the Divine Nature? The scheme of the atonement? or of the incarnation? or baptismal regeneration? Nay, but the Divine sympathy of the Divinest Man. The personal love of God, manifested in the face of Jesus Christ. The flood-gates of His soul were opened, and the whole force that was in the man flowed forth. Whichever way you take that expression, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor:" If it referred to the future, then, touched by unexpected sympathy, finding himself no longer an outcast, he made that resolve in gratefulness. If to the past, then, still touched by sympathy, he who had never tried to

Healing of Jairus' Daughter · 253

vindicate himself before the world, was softened to tell out the tale of his secret munificence. This is what I have been doing all the time they slandered me, and none but God knew it.

It required something to make a man like that talk of things which he had not suffered his own left hand to know, before a scorning world. But anyhow, it was the manifested Fellowship of the Son of Man, which brought salvation to that house.

Learn this : When we live the gospel so, and preach the gospel so, sinners will be brought to God. We know not yet the gospel power: for who trusts, as Jesus did, all to that? Who ventures, as He did, upon the power of Love, in sanguine hopefulness of the most irreclaimable? who makes *that*, the divine humility of Christ, "the gospel"? More than by eloquence, more than by accurate doctrine, more than by ecclesiastical order, more than by any doctrine trusted to by the most earnest and holy men, shall we and others, sinful rebels, outcasts, be won to Christ, by that central truth of all the gospel—the entireness of the Redeemer's sympathy.—In other words, the Love of Jesus.

THE HEALING OF JAIRUS' DAUGHTER

MATTHEW ix. 23-25.—“And when Jesus came into the ruler's house, and saw the minstrels and the people making a noise, he said unto them, Give place; for the maid is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn. But when the people were put forth, he went in, and took her by the hand, and the maid arose.”

THIS is one of a pair of miracles, the full instruction from neither of which can be gained, unless taken in connexion with the other.

On His way to heal the daughter of Jairus, the Son of Man was accosted by another sufferer, afflicted twelve years with an issue of blood. Humanly speaking, there were many causes which might have led to the rejection of her

254 · Healing of 'Jairus' Daughter

request. The case was urgent : a matter of life and death : delay might be fatal : a few minutes might make all the difference between living and dying. Yet Jesus not only performed the miracle, but refused to perform it in a hurried way : paused to converse : to inquire who had touched Him : to perfect the lesson of the whole. On His way to perform one act of Love, He turned aside to give His attention to another.

The practical lesson is this : There are many who are so occupied by one set of duties as to have no time for others : some whose life-business is the suppression of the slave-trade—the amelioration of the state of prisons—the reformation of public abuses. Right, except so far as they are monopolized by these, and feel themselves discharged from other obligations. The minister's work is spiritual ; the physician's temporal. But if the former neglect physical needs, or the latter shrink from spiritual opportunities on the plea that the cure of bodies, not of souls, is his work, so far they refuse to imitate their Master.

He had an ear open for every tone of wail : a heart ready to respond to every species of need. Specially the Redeemer of the soul, He was yet as emphatically the "Saviour of the body." He "taught the people : " but He did not neglect to multiply the loaves and fishes. The peculiar need of the woman : the father's cry of anguish : the infant's cry of helplessness : the wail of oppression, and the shriek of pain, —all were heard by Him, and none were heard in vain.

Therein lies the difference between Christian love and the impulse of mere inclinations. We hear of men being "interested" in a cause : it has some peculiar charm for them individually : the wants of the heathen ; or the destitution of the soldier and sailor ; or the conversion of the Jews, according to men's associations, or fancies, or peculiar bias, may engage their attention, and monopolize their sympathy. I am far from saying these are wrong : I only say that so far as they only *interest*, and monopolize interest, the source from which they spring is only human, and not the highest. The difference between such beneficence and

Healing of Jairus' Daughter 255

that which is the result of Christian love, is marked by partiality in one case, universality in the other. Love is universal. It is interested in all that is human: not merely in the concerns of its own family, nation, sect, or circle of associations. Humanity is the sphere of its activity.

Here, too, we find the Son of Man the pattern of our humanity. His bosom was to mankind what the Ocean is to the world. The Ocean has its own mighty tide; but it receives and responds to, in exact proportion, the tidal influences of every estuary, and river, and small creek which pours into its bosom. So in Christ; His bosom heaved with the tides of our humanity: but every separate sorrow, pain, and joy gave its pulsation, and received back influence from the sea of His being.

Looking at this matter somewhat more closely, it will be plain that the delay was only apparent:—seemingly there was delay, and fatal delay: while He yet spake there came news of the child's death. But just so far as the resurrection of the dead is a mightier miracle than the healing of the sick, just so far did the delay enhance and illustrate, instead of dimming the glory of His mission.

But more definitely still. The miracles of Jesus were not merely arbitrary acts: they were subject to the laws of the spiritual world. It was, we may humbly say, impossible to convey a spiritual blessing to one who was not spiritually susceptible. A certain inward character, a certain relation (rapport) to the Redeemer, was required to make the mercy efficacious. Hence in one place we read, "He could not do many miracles there because of their unbelief." And His perpetual question was, "Believest thou that I am able to do this?"

Now, Jairus beheld this miracle. He saw the woman's modest touch approaching the hem of the Saviour's garment. He saw the abashed look with which she shrunk from public gaze and exposure. He heard the language of Omniscience, "Somebody hath touched Me." He heard the great principle enunciated that the only touch which reaches God is that of faith. The multitude may throng and press: but

256 · Healing of Jairus' Daughter

heart to heart, soul to soul, mind to mind, only so do we come in actual contact with God. And remembering this, it is a matter not of probability, but of certainty, that the soul of Jairus was actually made more capable of a blessing than before : that he must have walked with a more hopeful step : that he must have heard the announcement, "Thy daughter is dead," with less dismay : that the words, "Fear not, only believe," must have come to him with deeper meaning, and been received with more implicit trust, than if Jesus had not paused to heal the woman, but hurried on.

And this is the principle of the spiritual kingdom. In matters worldly, the more occupations, duties, a man has, the more certain is he of doing all imperfectly. In the things of God, it is reversed. The more duties you perform, the more you are fitted for doing others : what you lose in time, you gain in strength. You do not love God the less but the more, for loving man. You do not weaken your affection for your family by cultivating attachments beyond its pale, but deepen and intensify it. Respect for the alien, tenderness for the heretic, do not interfere with, but rather strengthen attachment to your own country and your own church. He who is most liberal in the case of a foreign famine or a distant mission, will be found to have only learned more liberal love towards the poor and the unspiritualized of his own land : so false is the querulous complaint that money is drained away by such calls, to the disadvantage of more near and juster claims.

You do not injure one cause of mercy by turning aside to listen to the call of another.

- I. The uses of adversity.
- II. The principles of a Miracle.

I. The simplest and most obvious use of sorrow is to remind of God. Jairus and the woman, like many others, came to Christ from a sense of want. It would seem that a certain shock is needed to bring us in contact with reality. We are not conscious of our breathing till obstruction makes it felt. We are not aware of the possession of a heart till

Healing of Jairus' Daughter 257

some disease, some sudden joy or sorrow, rouses it into extraordinary action. And we are not conscious of the mighty cravings of our half Divine humanity; we are not aware of the God within us, till some chasm yawns which must be filled, or till the rending asunder of our affections forces us to become fearfully conscious of a need.

And this, too, is the reply to a rebellious question which our hearts are putting perpetually: Why am I treated so? Why is my health or my child taken from me? What have I done to deserve this? so Job passionately complained that God had set him up as a mark to empty His quiver on.

The reply is, that gifts are granted to elicit our affections: they are resumed to elicit them still more; for we never know the value of a blessing till it is gone. Health, children—we must lose them before we know the love which they contain.

However, we are not prepared to say that a charge might not with some plausibility be brought against the love of God, were no intimation ever given that God means to resume His blessings. That man may fairly complain of his adopted father, who has been educated as his own son, and after contracting habits of extravagance, looking forward to a certain line of life, cultivating certain tastes, is informed that he is only adopted: that he must part with these temporary advantages, and sink into a lower sphere. It would be a poor excuse to say that all he had before was so much gain, unmerited. It is enough to reply that false hopes were raised, and knowingly.

Nay, the laws of countries sanction this. After a certain period, a title to property cannot be interfered with: if a right of way or road has existed, in the venerable language of the law, after a custom "whereof the memory of man runneth not to the contrary," no private right, however dignified, can overthrow the public claim. I do not say that a bitter feeling might not have some show of justice if such were the case with God's blessings.

But the truth is this: God confers His gifts with distinct reminders that they are His. He gives us for a season,

258 · Healing of Jairus' Daughter

Spirits taken out of His universe: brings them into temporary contact with us: and we call them father, mother, sister, child, friend. But just as in some places, on one day in the year, the way or path is closed in order to remind the public that they pass by sufferance and not by right, in order that no lapse of time may establish "adverse possession," so does God give warning to us. Every ache and pain: every wrinkle you see stamping itself on a parent's brow: every accident which reveals the uncertain tenure of life and possessions: every funeral-bell that tolls—are only God's reminders that we are tenants at will and not by right—pensioners on the bounty of an hour. He is closing up the right of way, warning fairly that what we have, is lent, not given: His, not ours. His mercies are so much gain. The resumption of them is no injustice. Job learned that, too, by heart, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord."

Again, observe the misuse of sorrow. When He came to the house, He found the minstrels and people making a noise. In the East, not content with natural grief, they use artificial means to deepen and prolong it. Men and women make it a separate profession to act as mourners, to exhibit for hire the customary symbols and wail of grief, partly to soothe and partly to rivet sorrow deeply, by the expression of it.

The South and North differ greatly from each other in this respect. The nations of the North restrain their grief—affect the tearless eye, and the stern look. The expressive South, and all the nations whose origin is from thence, are demonstrative in grief. They beat their breasts, tear their hair, throw dust upon their heads. It would be unwise were either to blame or ridicule the other, so long as each is true to Nature. Unwise for the nations of the South to deny the reality of the grief which is repressed and silent. Unjust in the denizen of the North were he to scorn the violence of Southern grief, or call its uncontrollable demonstrations unmanly. Much must be allowed for temperament.

These two opposite tendencies, however, indicate the two

Healing of Jairus' Daughter 259

extremes into which men may fall in this matter of sorrow. There are two ways in which we may defeat the purposes of God in grief—by forgetting it, or by over-indulging it.

The world's way is to forget. It prescribes gaiety as the remedy for woe: banishes all objects which recall the past: makes it the etiquette of feeling, even amongst near relations, to abstain from the mention of the names of the lost: gets rid of the mourning weeds as soon as possible—the worst of all remedies for grief. Sorrow, the discipline of the Cross, is the school for all that is highest in us. Self-knowledge, true power, all that dignifies humanity, are precluded the moment you try to merely banish grief. It is a touching truth that the Saviour refused the anodyne on the cross that would have deadened pain. He would not steep his senses in oblivion. He would not suffer one drop to trickle down the side of His Father's cup of anguish untasted.

The other way is to nurse sorrow: nay, even our best affections may tempt us to this. It seems treason to those we have loved to be happy now. We sit beneath the cypress; we school ourselves to gloom. Romance magnifies the fidelity of the broken heart: we refuse to be comforted.

Now all this must be done by effort, generally speaking. For God has so constituted both our hearts and the world, that it is hard to prolong grief beyond a time. Say what we will, the heart has in it a surprising, nay, a startling elasticity. It cannot sustain unalterable melancholy: and beside our very pathway plants grow, healing and full of balmy. It is a sullen heart that can withstand the slow but sure influences of the morning sun, the summer day, the sky, and flowers, and the soothing power of human sympathy.

We are meant to sorrow; but “not as those without hope.” The rule seems to consist in being simply natural. The great thing which Christ did was to call men back to simplicity and nature; not to perverted but original nature. He counted it no derogation of His manhood to be seen to weep. He thought it no shame to mingle with merry crowds. He opened His heart wide to all the genial and all the mournful impressions of this manifold life of ours.

260 · Healing of Jairus' Daughter

And this is what we have to do; be natural. Let God, that is, let the influences of God, freely play unthwarted upon the soul. Let there be no unnatural repression, no control of feeling by mere effort.⁶ Let there be no artificial and prolonged grief, no "minstrels making a noise." Let great Nature have her way. Or rather, feel that you are in a Father's world, and live in it with Him, frankly, in a free, fearless, childlike, and natural spirit. Then grief will do its work healthily. The heart will bleed, and stanch when it has bled enough. Do not stop the bleeding: but, also, do not open the wound afresh.

II. We come to the principles on which a miracle rests.

1. I observe, that the perception of it was confined to a few. Peter, James, John, and the parents of the child, were the only ones present. The rest were excluded. To behold wonders, certain inward qualifications, a certain state of heart, a certain susceptibility, are required. Those who were shut out were rendered incapable by disqualifications. Absence of spiritual susceptibility in the case of those who "laughed Him to scorn"—unbelief in those who came with courteous scepticism, saying, "Trouble not the Master," in other words, He is not master of impossibilities—unreality in the professional mourners—the most hopeless of all disqualifications. Their whole life was acting: they had caught the tone of condolence and sympathy as a trick. Before minds such as these the wonders of creation may be spread in vain. Grief and joy alike are powerless to break through the crust of artificial semblance which envelopes them. Such beings see no miracles. They gaze on all with dead, dim eyes—wrapped in conventionalisms, their life a drama in which they are but actors, modulating their tones and simulating feelings according to a received standard. How can such be ever witnesses of the supernatural, or enter into the presence of the Wonderful? Two classes alone were admitted. They who, like Peter, James, and John, lived the life of courage, moral purity, and love, and they who, like the parents, had had

Healing of Jairus' Daughter 261

the film removed from their eyes by grief. For there is a way which God has of forcing the spiritual upon men's attention. When you shut down the lid upon the coffin of a child, or one as dearly loved, there is an awful want, a horrible sense of insecurity, which sweeps away the glittering mist of time from the edge of the abyss, and you gaze on the phantom—wonders of the unseen. Yes—real anguish qualifies for an entrance into the solemn chamber where all is miracle.

In another way, and for another reason, the numbers of those who witness a miracle must be limited. Jairus had his daughter restored to life: the woman was miraculously healed. But if every anxious parent and every sick sufferer could have the wonder repeated in his or her case, the wonder itself would cease. This is the preposterousness of the sceptic's demand,—Let *me* see a miracle, on an appointed day and hour, and I will believe. Let us examine this.

A miracle is commonly defined to be a contravention of the laws of nature. More properly speaking, it is only a higher operation of those same laws, in a form hitherto unseen. A miracle is perhaps no more a suspension or contradiction of the laws of nature than a hurricane or a thunderstorm. They who first travelled to tropical latitudes came back with anecdotes of supernatural convulsions of the elements. In truth, it was only that they had never personally witnessed such effects: but the hurricane which swept the waves flat, and the lightning which illuminated all the heaven or played upon the bayonets or masts in lambent flame, were but effects of the very same laws of electricity and meteorology which were in operation at home. A miracle is perhaps no more in contravention of the laws of the universe than the direct interposition of a whole nation in cases of emergency to uphold what is right in opposition to what is established, is an opposition to the laws of the realm. For instance, the whole people of Israel reversed the unjust decree of Saul which had sentenced Jonathan to death. But the law is the expression only of a people's will. Ordinarily we see that expression mediately

262 · Healing of Jairus' Daughter

made through judges, office-bearers, kings : and so long as we see it in this mediate form, we are by habit satisfied that all is legal. There are cases, however, in which, not an indirect, but a direct expression of a nation's will is demanded. Extraordinary cases ; and because extraordinary, they who can only see what is legal in what is customary, conventional, and in the routine of written precedents ; get bewildered, and reckon the anomalous act illegal or rebellious. In reality, it is only the source of earthly law, the nation, pronouncing the law without the intervention of the subordinate agents.

This will help us to understand the nature of a miracle. What we call laws are simply the subordinate expressions of a Will. There must be a Will before there can be a law. Certain antecedents are followed by certain consequents. When we see this succession, we are satisfied, and call it natural. But there are emergencies in which it may be necessary for the Will to assert Itself, and become not the mediate, but the immediate antecedent to the consequent. No subordinate agent interposes ; simply the First cause comes in contact with a result. The audible expression of Will is followed immediately by something which is generally preceded by some lower antecedent, which we call a cause. In this case, you will observe, there has been no contravention of the laws of Nature—there has only been an immediate connexion between the First cause and the last result. A miracle is the manifestation to man of the voluntariness of Power.

Now, bearing this in mind, let it be supposed that every one had a right to demand a miracle ; that the occurrence of miracles was unlimited ; that as often as you had an ache, or trembled for the loss of a relation, you had but to pray, and receive your wish.

Clearly in this case, first of all, the constitution of the universe would be reversed. The will of man would be substituted for the will of God. Caprice and chance would regulate all :—God would be dethroned : God would be degraded to the rank of one of those beings of supernatural

Healing of Jairus' Daughter 263

power with whom Eastern romance abounds, who are subordinated by a spell to the will of a mortal, who is armed with their powers and uses them as vassals: God would be merely the genius who would be chained by the spell of prayer to obey the behests of man. Man would arm himself with the powers of Deity, and God would be his slave.

Further still: This unlimited extension of miracles would annihilate miracles themselves. For suppose that miracles were universal: that prayer was directly followed by a reply: that we could all heal the sick and raise the dead: this then would become the common order of things. It would be what we now call nature. It would cease to be extraordinary, and the infidel would be as unsatisfied as ever. He would see only the antecedent, prayer, and the invariable consequent, a reply to prayer; exactly what he sees now in the process of causation. And then, just as now, he would say, What more do you want? These are the laws of the universe: Why interpose the complex and cumbrous machinery of a God, the awkward hypothesis of a Will, to account for laws?

Miracles, then, are necessarily limited. The non-limitation of miracles would annihilate the miraculous.

Lastly, It is the intention of a miracle to manifest the Divine in the common and ordinary.

For instance, in a boat on the sea of Tiberias, the Redeemer rose and rebuked the storm. Was that miracle merely a proof of His Divine mission? Are we merely to gather from it, that then and there on a certain day, in a certain obscure corner of the world, Divine power was at work? It is conceivable that a man might credit that miracle: that he might be exceedingly indignant with the rationalist who resolves it into a natural phenomenon—and it is conceivable that that very man might tremble in a storm. To what purpose is that miracle announced to him? He believes in God existing in the past, but not in the present: he believes in a Divine presence in the supernatural, but discredits it in the natural; he recognises God

264 : Faith of the Centurion

in the marvellous, but does not feel Him in the wonderful of every day : unless it has taught him that the waves and winds now are in the hollow of the hand of God, the miracle has lost its meaning.

Here again, as in many other cases, Christ healed sickness and raised the dead to life. Are we merely to insert this among the "Evidences of Christianity," and then, with lawyer-like sagacity, having laid down the rules of Evidence, say to the Infidel, "Behold our credentials : we call upon you to believe our Christianity" ? This were a poor reason to account for the putting forth of Almighty Power. More truly and more deeply, these miracles were vivid manifestations to the senses that Christ is the Saviour of the body : that now, as ~~then~~, the issues of life and death are in His hands : that our daily existence is a perpetual miracle. The extraordinary was simply a manifestation of God's power in the ordinary. Nay, the ordinary marvels are greater than the extraordinary, for these are subordinate to them ; merely indications and handmaids guiding us to perceive and recognise a constant Presence, and reminding us that in every-day existence the miraculous and the God-like rule us.

FAITH OF THE CENTURION

MATTHEW viii. 10.—"When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel."

THAT upon which the Son of God fastened as worthy of admiration was not the centurion's benevolence, nor his perseverance, but his faith. And so speaks the whole New Testament ; giving a special dignity to faith. By faith we are justified. By faith man removes mountains of difficulty. As the Divinest attribute in the heart of God is Love, and the mightiest, because the most human, principle in the breast of man is faith : Love is heaven, Faith is that which appropriates heaven.

Faith is a theological term rarely used in other matters. Hence its meaning is obscured. But faith is no strange, new, peculiar power, supernaturally infused by Christianity ; but the same principle by which we live from day to day, one of the commonest in our daily life.

We trust our senses ; and that though they often deceive us. We trust men ; a battle must often be risked on the intelligence of a spy. A merchant commits his ships with all his fortunes on board to a hired captain, whose temptations are enormous. Without this principle society could not hold together for a day. It would be a sand-heap.

Such, too, is religious faith ; we trust on probabilities ; and this though probabilities often are against us. We cannot prove God's existence. The balance of probabilities, scientifically speaking, are nearly equal for a living Person or a lifeless Cause: Immortality, &c., in the same way. But faith throws its own convictions into the scale and decides the preponderance.

Faith then, is that which, when probabilities are equal, ventures on God's side and on the side of right, on the guarantee of a something within which makes the thing seem to be true because loved.

So defined by St. Paul: "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen." The hope is the ground.

I. The faith which was commended.

II. The causes of the commendation.

I. The faith which was commended.

First evidence of its existence—His tenderness to his servant.

Of course this good act might have existed separate from religion. Romans were benevolent to their domestics, ages before the law had been enacted regulating the relationship between patron and client.

But we are forbidden to view it so, when we remember

266 Faith of the Centurion

that he was a proselyte. Morality is not religion, but it is ennobled and made more delicate by religion.

How? By instinct you may be kind to dependents. But if it be only by instinct, it is but the same kind of tenderness you show to your hound or horse. Disbelief in God, and Right, and Immortality, degrades the man you are kind to, to the level of the beast you feel for. Both are mortal; and for both your kindness is finite and poor.

But the moment Faith comes, dealing as it does with things infinite, it throws something of its own infinitude on the persons loved by the man of faith, upon his affections, and his acts: it raises them.

Consequently you find the centurion "building Synagogues," "caring for our (*i. e.* the Jewish) nation," as the Repository of the Truth—tending his servants. And this last, observe, approximated his moral goodness to the Christian standard: for therein does Christianity differ from mere religiousness, that it is not a worship of the high, but a lifting up of the low—not hero-worship, but Divine condescension.

Thus, then, was his kindliness an evidence of his faith.

Second proof. His humility: "Lord, I am not worthy that Thou shouldest come under my roof."

Now Christ does not call this humility, though it was humility. He says, I have not found so great *faith*. Let us see why. How is humbleness the result of, or rather identical with, Faith?

Faith is trust. Trust is dependence on another; the spirit which is opposite to independence or trust in self. Hence where the spirit of proud independence is, faith is not.

Now observe how this differs from our ordinary and modern modes of thinking. The first thing taught a young man is that he must be independent. Quite right in the Christian sense of the word, to owe no man anything: to resolve to get his own living and not be beholden to charity, which fosters idleness: to depend on his own exertions, and not on patronage or connexion. But what

is commonly meant by independence is to rejoice at being bound by no ties to other human beings; to owe no allegiance to any will except our own: to be isolated and unconnected by any feeling of intercommunion or dependence; a spirit whose very life is jealousy and suspicion: which in politics is revolutionism, and in religion atheism. This is the opposite of Christianity, and the opposite of the Christian freedom whose name it usurps. For true freedom is to be emancipated from all false lords, in order to owe allegiance to all true lords: to be free from the slavery of all lusts, so as voluntarily to serve God and Right. Faith alone frees.

And this was the freedom of the Centurion: that he *chose* his master. He was not fawning on the Emperor at Rome: nor courting the immoral ruler at Cæsarea, who had titles and places to give away: but he bent in lowliest homage of heart before the Holy One. His freedom was the freedom of uncoerced and voluntary dependence; the freedom and humility of Faith.

3. His belief in an invisible, living Will. "Speak the word only." Remark how different this is from: a reliance on the influence of the senses. He asked not the presence of Christ, but simply an exertion of His Will. He looked not like a physician to the operation of unerring laws: or the result of the contact of matter with matter. He believed in Him who is the Life indeed. He felt that the Cause of Causes is a Person. Hence he could trust the Living Will out of sight. This is the highest form of faith.

Here, however, I observe:

The Centurion learned this through his own profession. "I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me." The argument ran thus. I by the command of will obtain the obedience of my dependents. Thou by will the obedience of Thine: sickness and health are Thy servants.

Evidently he looked upon this universe with a soldier's eye: he could not look otherwise. To him this world was a mighty camp of Living Forces in which Authority was paramount. Trained in obedience to military law,

accustomed to render prompt submission to those above him, and to exact it from those below him, he read Law everywhere: and Law to him meant nothing, unless it meant the expression of a Personal Will. It was this training through which Faith took its *form*.

The Apostle Paul tells us that the invisible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly seen; and, we may add, from *every part* of the creation of the world—"The heavens declare the glory of God;" but so also does the buttercup and the raindrop.

The invisible things of God from life are clearly seen—and, we may add, from every department of life. There is no profession, no trade, no human occupation which does not in its own way educate for God.

The soldier through Law reads a personal will; and he might from the same profession, in the unity of an army, made a living and organized unity by the variety of its parts, have read the principle of God's and the Church's unity, through the opportunities that profession affords for self-control, for generous deeds. When the Gospel was first announced on earth, it was proclaimed to the shepherds and Magians in a manner appropriate to their modes of life.

Shepherds, like sailors, are accustomed to hear a supernatural Power in the sounds of the air, in the moaning of the night-winds, in the sighing of the storm; to see a more than mortal life in the clouds that wreath around the headland. Such men, brought up among the sights and sounds of nature, are proverbially superstitious. No wonder therefore that the intimation came to them, as it were, on the winds in the melodies of the air: "a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will toward men."

But the Magians being astrologers, accustomed to read the secrets of Life and Death in the clear star-lit skies of Persia, are conducted by a meteor.

Each in his own way: each in his own profession: each through that little spot of the universe given to him. For not only is God everywhere, but all of God is in every point.

Not His wisdom here, and His goodness there : the whole truth may be read, if we had eyes, and heart, and time enough, in the laws of a daisy's growth. God's Beauty, His Love, His Unity : nay, if you observe how each atom exists not for itself alone, but for the sake of every other atom in the universe, in that atom or daisy you may read the law of the Cross itself. The crawling of a spider before now has taught perseverance, and led to a crown. The little moss, brought close to a traveller's eye in an African desert, who had lain down to die, roused him to faith in that Love which had so curiously arranged the minute fibres of a thing so small, to be seen once and but once by a human eye, and carried him, like Elijah of old, in the strength of that heavenly repast, a journey of forty days and forty nights, to the sources of the Nile ; yet who could have suspected divinity in a spider, or theology in a moss ?

II. The causes of the astonishment.

The reasons why he marvelled may be reduced under two heads.

1. The Centurion was a Gentile ; therefore unlikely to know revealed truth.

2. A soldier, and therefore exposed to a recklessness, and idleness, and sensuality, which are the temptations of that profession. But he turned his loss to glorious gain.

The Saviour's comment therefore contained the advantage of disadvantages, and the disadvantage of advantages. The former, "Many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven." The latter, "The children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness ; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

There are spirits which are crushed by difficulties ; while others would gain strength from them. The greatest men have been those who have cut their way to success through difficulties. And such have been the greatest triumphs of art and science : such too of religion. Moses, Elijah, Abraham, the Baptist, the giants of both Testaments, were

not men nurtured in the hothouse of religious advantages. Many a man would have done good if he had not a superabundance of the means of doing it. Many a spiritual giant is buried under mountains of gold.

Understand therefore the real amount of advantage which there is in religious privileges. Necessary especially for the feeble, as crutches are necessary; but, like crutches, they often enfeeble the strong. For every advantage which facilitates performance and supersedes toil, a corresponding price is paid in loss. Civilisation gives us telescopes and microscopes; but it takes away the unerring acuteness with which the savage reads the track of man and beast upon the ground at his feet: it gives us scientific surgery, and impairs the health which made surgery superfluous.

So, ask you where the place of religious might is? Not the place of religious privileges—not where prayers are daily, and sacraments monthly—not where sermons are so abundant as to pall upon the pampered taste: but on the hillside with the Covenanter: in the wilderness with John the Baptist: in our own dependencies where the liturgy is rarely heard, and Christian friends meet at the end of months:—there, amidst manifold disadvantages, when the soul is thrown upon itself, a few kindred spirits, and God: grow up those heroes of faith, like the Centurion, whose firm conviction wins admiration even from the Son of God Himself.

Lastly, See how this incident testifies to the perfect Humanity of Christ. The Saviour “marvelled:”—that wonder was no fictitious semblance of admiration. It was a real genuine wonder. He had not expected to find such faith. The Son of God increased in wisdom as well as stature. He knew more at thirty than at twenty. There were things He knew at twenty which He had not known before. In the last year of His life, He went to the fig-tree expecting to find fruit, and was disappointed. In all matters of Eternal truth: principles, which are not measured by more or less true: His knowledge was absolute: but it would seem that in matters of earthly fact, which are modified by

The Prodigal and His Brother · 271

time and space, His knowledge was like ours, more or less dependent upon experience.

Now we forget this—we are shocked at the thought of the partial ignorance of Christ, as if it were irreverence to think it : we shrink from believing that He really felt the force of temptation ; or that the Forsakenness on the Cross and the momentary doubt have parallels in our human life. In other words, we make that Divine Life a mere mimic representation of griefs that were not real, and surprises that were feigned, and sorrows that were theatrical.

But thus we lose the Saviour. For it is well to know that He was Divine : but if we lose that truth, we should still have a God in heaven. But if there has been on this earth no real, perfect human life, no Love that never cooled, no Faith that never failed, which may shine as a loadstar across the darkness of our experience, a light to light amidst all convictions of our own meanness and all suspicions of others' littleness—why, we may have a Religion, but we have not a Christianity. For if we lose Him as a Brother, we cannot feel Him as a Saviour.

THE PRODIGAL AND HIS BROTHER

LUKE xv. 31, 32.—“And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad : for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again ; was lost, and is found.”

THERE are two classes of sin. There are some sins by which man crushes, wounds, malevolently injures his brother man : those sins which speak of a bad, tyrannical, and selfish heart. Christ met those with denunciation. There are other sins by which a man injures himself. There is a life of reckless indulgence ; there is a career of yielding to ungovernable propensities, which most surely conducts to wretchedness and ruin, but makes a man an object of compassion rather than of condemnation. The reception which

272 The Prodigal and His Brother

sinners of this class met from Christ was marked by strange and pitying mercy. There was no maudlin sentiment on His lips. He called sin sin, and guilt guilt. But yet there were sins which His lips scourged, and others over which, containing in themselves their own scourge, His heart bled. That which was melancholy, and marred, and miserable in this world, was more congenial to the heart of Christ than that which was proudly happy. It was in the midst of a triumph, and all the pride of a procession, that He paused to weep over ruined Jerusalem. And if we ask the reason why the character of Christ was marked by this melancholy condescension, it is that He was in the midst of a world of ruins, and there was nothing there to gladden, but very much to touch with grief. He was here to restore that which was broken down and crumbling into decay. An enthusiastic antiquarian, standing amidst the fragments of an ancient temple surrounded by dust and moss, broken pillar, and defaced architrave, with magnificent projects in his mind of restoring all this to *former* majesty, to draw out to light from mere rubbish the ruined glories, and therefore stooping down amongst the dank ivy and the rank nettles; such was Christ amidst the wreck of human nature. He was striving to lift it out of its degradation. He was searching out in revolting places that which had fallen down, that He might build it up again in fair proportions a holy temple to the Lord. Therefore He laboured among the guilty; therefore He was the companion of outcasts; therefore He spoke tenderly and lovingly to those whom society counted undone; therefore He loved to bind up the bruised and the broken-hearted; therefore His breath fanned the spark which seemed dying out in the wick of the expiring taper, when men thought that it was too late, and that the hour of hopeless profligacy was come. It was that feature in His character, that tender, hoping, encouraging spirit of His which the prophet Isaiah fixed upon as characteristic. "A bruised reed will He not break."

It was an illustration of this spirit which He gave in the parable which forms the subject of our consideration to-day.

The Prodigal and His Brother · 273

We find the occasion which drew it from Him in the commencement of this chapter, "Then drew near unto Him all the publicans and sinners for to hear Him. And the Pharisees and Scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." It was then that Christ condescended to offer an excuse or an explanation of His conduct. And His excuse was this: It is natural, humanly natural, to rejoice more over that which has been recovered than over that which has been never lost. He proved that by three illustrations taken from human life. The first illustration intended to show the feelings of Christ in winning back a sinner, was the joy which the shepherd feels in the recovery of a sheep from the mountain wilderness. The second was the satisfaction which a person feels for a recovered coin. The last was the gladness which attends the restoration of an erring son.

Now, the three parables are alike in this, that they all describe more or less vividly the feelings of the Redeemer on the recovery of the lost. But the third parable differs from the other two in this, that besides the feelings of the Saviour, it gives us a multitude of particulars respecting the feelings, the steps, and the motives of the penitent who is reclaimed back to goodness. In the two first the thing lost is a coin or a sheep. It would not be possible to find any picture of remorse or gladness there. But in the third parable the thing lost is not a lifeless thing, nor a mute thing, but a being the workings of whose human heart are all described. So that the subject opened out to us is a more extensive one—not merely the feelings of the finder, God in Christ, but besides that the sensations of the wanderer himself.

In dealing with this parable, this is the line which we shall adopt.

We shall look at the picture which it draws of—1. God's treatment of the penitent. 2. God's expostulation with the saint. God's treatment of the penitent divides itself in this parable into three distinct epochs. The period of alienation, the period of repentance, and the circumstances of

274 · The Prodigal and His Brother

a penitent reception. We shall consider all these in turn.

The first truth exhibited in this parable is the alienation of man's heart from God. Homelessness, distance from our Father—that is man's state by nature in this world. The youngest son gathered all together and took his journey into a *far* country. Brethren, this is the history of worldliness. It is a state far from God ; in other words, it is a state of homelessness. And now let us ask what that means. To English hearts it is not necessary to expound elaborately the infinite meanings which cluster round that blessed expression "home." Home is the one place in all this world where hearts are sure of each other. It is the place of confidence. It is the place where we tear off that mask of guarded and suspicious coldness which the world forces us to wear in self-defence, and where we pour out the unreserved communications of full and confiding hearts. It is the spot where expressions of tenderness gush out without any sensation of awkwardness and without any dread of ridicule. Let a man travel where he will, home is the place to which "his heart untravelled fondly turns." He is to double all pleasure there. He is there to divide all pain. A *happy home* is the single spot of rest which a man has upon this earth for the cultivation of his noblest sensibilities. And now, my brethren, if that be the description of home, is God's place of rest your home? Walk abroad and alone by night. That awful other world in the stillness and the solemn deep of the eternities above, is it your home? Those graves that lie beneath you, holding in them the infinite secret, and stamping upon all earthly loveliness the mark of frailty and change and fleetingness—are those graves the prospect to which in bright days and dark days you can turn without dismay? God in His splendours,—dare we feel with Him affectionate and familiar, so that trial comes softened by this feeling—it is my Father, and enjoyment can be taken with a frank feeling ; my Father has given it me, without grudging, to make me happy? All that

The Prodigal and His Brother · 275

is having a home in God. Are we at home there? Why, there is demonstration in our very childhood that we are not at home with that other world of God's. An infant fears to be alone, because he feels he is not alone. He trembles in the dark, because he is conscious of the presence of the world of spirits. Long before he has been told tales of terror, there is an instinctive dread of the supernatural in the infant mind. It is the instinct which we have from childhood that gives us the feeling of another world. And mark, brethren, if the child is not at home in the thought of that world of God's, the deep of darkness and eternity is around him—God's home, but not his home, for his flesh creeps. And that feeling grows through life; not the fear—when the child becomes a man he gets over fear—but the dislike. The man feels as much aversion as the child for the world of spirits.

Sunday comes. It breaks across the current of his worldliness. It suggests thoughts of death and judgment and everlasting existence. Is that home? Can the worldly man feel Sunday like a foretaste of his Father's mansion? If we could but know how many have come here to-day, not to have their souls lifted up heavenwards, but from curiosity, or idleness, or criticism, it would give us an appalling estimate of the number who are living in a far country "having no hope and without God in the world."

The second truth conveyed to us in this parable is the unsatisfying nature of worldly happiness. The outcast son tried to satiate his appetite with husks. A husk is an empty thing; it is a thing which looks extremely like food and promises as much as food; but it is not food. It is a thing which when chewed will stay the appetite, but leaves the emaciated body without nourishment. Earthly happiness is a husk. We say not that there is no satisfaction in the pleasures of a worldly life. That would be an overstatement of the truth. Something there is, or else why should men persist in living for them? The cravings of man's appetite may be stayed by things which cannot satisfy him. Every new pursuit contains in it a new hope; and it

276 The Prodigal and His Brother

is long before hope is bankrupt. But, my brethren, it is strange if a man has not found out long before he has reached the age of thirty, that everything here is empty and disappointing. The nobler his heart and the more unquenchable his hunger for the high and the good, the sooner will he find that out. Bubble after bubble bursts, each bubble tinted with the celestial colours of the rainbow, and each leaving in the hand which crushes it a cold damp drop of disappointment. All that is described in Scripture by the emphatic metaphor of "sowing the wind and reaping the whirlwind," the whirlwind of blighted hopes and unreturned feelings and crushed expectations—that is the harvest which the world gives you to reap.

And now is the question asked, Why is this world unsatisfying? Brethren, it is the grandeur of the soul which God has given us which makes us insatiable in our desires—an infinite void which cannot be filled up. A soul which was made for God, how can the world fill it? If the ocean can be still with miles of unstable waters beneath it, then the soul of man, rocking itself upon its own deep longings, with the Infinite beneath it, may rest. We were created once in majesty, to find enjoyment in God, and if our hearts are empty now, there is nothing for it but to fill up the hollowness of the soul with God. Let not that expression—filling the soul with God—pass away without a distinct meaning. God is Love and Goodness. Fill the soul with goodness, and fill the soul with love, that is the filling it with God. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us. There is nothing else that can satisfy. So that when we hear men of this world acknowledge, as they sometimes will do, when they are wearied with this phantom chase of life, sick of gaieties and tired of toil, that it is not in their pursuits that they can drink the fount of blessedness; and when we see them, instead of turning aside either broken-hearted or else made wise, still persisting to trust to expectations—at fifty, sixty, or seventy years still feverish about some new plan of ambition—what we see is this: we see a soul formed with a capacity for high and

The Prodigal and His Brother :277

noble things, fit for the banquet table of God Himself, trying to fill its infinite hollowness with husks.

Once more, there is degradation in the life of irreligion. The things which the wanderer tried to live on were not husks only. They were husks which the swine did eat. Degradation means the application of a thing to purposes lower than that for which it was intended. It is degradation to a man to live on husks, because these are not his true food. We call it degradation when we see the members of an ancient family, decayed by extravagance, working for their bread. It is not degradation for a born labourer to work for an honest livelihood. It is degradation for them, for they are not what they might have been. And therefore, for a man to be degraded, it is not necessary that he should have given himself up to low and mean practices. It is quite enough that he is living for purposes lower than those for which God intended him. He may be a man of unblemished reputation, and yet debased in the truest meaning of the word. We were sent into this world to love God and to love man; to do good—to fill up life with deeds of generosity and usefulness. And he that refuses to work out that high destiny is a degraded man. He may turn away revolted from everything that is gross. His sensuous indulgences may be all marked by refinement and taste. His house may be filled with elegance. His library may be adorned with books. There may be the sounds in his mansion which can regale the ear, the delicacies which can stimulate the palate, and the forms of beauty which can please the eye. There may be nothing in his whole life to offend the most chastened and fastidious delicacy; and yet, if the history of all this be frittered upon time powers which were meant for eternity, the man is degraded—if the spirit which was created to find its enjoyment in the love of God has settled down satisfied with the love of the world, then, just as surely as the sensualist of this parable, that man has turned aside from a celestial feast to prey on garbage.

We pass on to the second period of the history of God's treatment of a sinner. It is the period of his coming to

278 The Prodigal and His Brother

himself, or what we call repentance. The first fact of religious experience which this parable suggests to us is that common truth—men desert the world when the world deserts them. The renegade came to himself when there were no more husks to eat. He would have remained away if he could have got them, but it is written, “no man gave unto him.” And this, brethren, is the record of our shame. Invitation is not enough; we must be driven to God. And the famine comes not by chance. God sends the famine into the soul—the hunger, and thirst, and the disappointment—to bring back His erring child again. Now, the world fastens upon that truth, and gets out of it a triumphant sarcasm against religion. They tell us that just as the caterpillar passes into the chrysalis, and the chrysalis into the butterfly, so profligacy passes into disgust, and disgust passes into religion. To use their own phraseology, when people become disappointed with the world, it is the last resource, they say, to turn saint. So the men of the world speak, and they think they are profoundly philosophical and concise in the account they give. The world is welcome to its very small sneer. It is the glory of our Master’s gospel that it is the refuge of the broken-hearted. It is the strange mercy of our God that He does not reject the writhings of a jaded heart. Let the world curl its lip if it will, when it sees through the causes of the prodigal’s return. And if the sinner does not come to God taught by this disappointment, what then? If affections crushed in early life have driven one man to God; if wrecked and ruined hopes have made another man religious; if want of success in a profession has broken the spirit; if the human life lived out too passionately, has left a surfeit and a craving behind which end in seriousness; if one is brought by the sadness of widowed life, and another by the forced desolation of involuntary single life; if when the mighty famine comes into the heart, and not a husk is left, not a pleasure untried, then, and not till then, the remorseful resolve is made, “I will arise and go to my Father:”—Well, brethren, what then? Why this, that the history of penitence, pro-

The Prodigal and His Brother :279

duced as it so often is by mere disappointment, sheds only a brighter lustre round the love of Christ, who rejoices to receive such wanderers, worthless as they are, back into His bosom. Thank God the world's sneer is true. It is the last resource to turn saint. Thanks to our God that when this gaudy world has ceased to charm, when the heart begins to feel its hollowness, and the world has lost its satisfying power, still all is not yet lost if penitence and Christ remain, to still, to humble, and to soothe a heart which sin has fevered.

There is another truth contained in this section of the parable. After a life of wild sinfulness religion is servitude at first, not freedom. Observe, he went back to duty with the feelings of a slave; "I am no more worthy to be called thy son, make me as one of thy hired servants." Any one who has lived in the excitement of the world, and then tried to settle down at once to quiet duty, knows how true that is. To borrow a metaphor from Israel's desert life, it is a tasteless thing to live on manna after you have been feasting upon quails. It is a dull cold drudgery to find pleasure in simple occupation when life has been a succession of strong emotions. Sonship it is not; it is slavery. A son obeys in love, entering heartily into his father's meaning. A servant obeys mechanically, rising early because he must; doing, it may be, his duty well, but feeling in all its force the irksomeness of the service. Sonship does not come all at once. The yoke of Christ is easy, the burden of Christ is light; but it is not light to everybody. It is light when you love it, and no man who has sinned much can love it all at once. Therefore, if I speak to any one who is trying to be religious, and heavy in heart because his duty is done too formally,—my Christian brother, fear not. You are returning, like the prodigal, with the feelings of a servant. Still it is a real return. The spirit of adoption will come afterwards. You will often have to do duties which you cannot relish, and in which you see no meaning. So it was with Naaman at the prophet's command. He bathed, not knowing why he was bidden to bathe in Jordan. When you bend to

280 : The Prodigal and His Brother

prayer, often and often you will have to kneel with wandering thoughts, and constraining lips to repeat words into which your heart scarcely enters. You will have to perform duties when the heart is cold, and without a spark of enthusiasm to warm you. But, my Christian brother, onwards still. Struggle to the Cross, even though it be struggling as in chains. Just as on a day of clouds, when you have watched the distant hills, dark and grey with mist, suddenly a gleam of sunshine passing over reveals to you, in that flat surface valleys and dells and spots of sunny happiness which slept before unsuspected in the fog, so in the gloom of penitential life there will be times when God's deep peace and love will be felt shining into the soul with supernatural refreshment. Let the penitent be content with the servant's lot at first. Liberty and peace, and the bounding sensations of a Father's arms around you, come afterwards.

The last circumstance in this division of our subject is the reception which a sinner meets with on his return to God. "Bring forth the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet, and bring hither the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and be merry." This banquet represents to us two things. It tells of the father's gladness on his son's return. That represents God's joy on the reformation of a sinner. It tells of a banquet and a dance given to the long lost son. That represents the sinner's gladness when he first understood that God was reconciled to him in Christ. There is a strange, almost wild, rapture, a strong gush of love and happiness in those days which are called the days of first conversion. When a man who has sinned much—a profligate—turns to God, and it becomes first clear to his apprehension that there is love instead of spurning for him, there is a luxury of emotion—a banquet of tumultuous blessedness in the moment of first love to God, which stands alone in life, nothing before and nothing after like it. And, brethren, let us observe—this forgiveness is a thing granted while a man is yet afar off. We are not to wait for the right of being happy till we are good: we might wait for ever. Joy

The Prodigal and His Brother : 281

is not delayed till we deserve it. Just so soon as a sinful man trusts that the mercy of God in Christ has done away with his transgression, the ring, and the robe, and the shoes are his, the banquet and the light of a Father's countenance.

Lastly, we have to consider very briefly God's expostulation with a saint. There is another brother mentioned in this parable, who expressed something like indignation at the treatment which his brother met with. There are commentators who have imagined that this personage represents the Pharisees who complained that Jesus was receiving sinners. But this is manifestly impossible, because his father expostulates with him in this language, "Son, thou art ever with me;" not for one moment could that be true of the Pharisees. The true interpretation seems to be that this elder brother represents a real Christian perplexed with God's mysterious dealings. We have before us the description of one of those happy persons who have been filled with the Holy Ghost from their mother's womb, and on the whole (with imperfections of course) remained God's servant all his life. For this is his own account of himself, which the father does not contradict: "Lo! these many years do I serve thee." We observe then: 1. The objection made to the reception of a notorious sinner: "Thou never gavest me a kid." Now, in this we have a fact true to Christian experience. Joy seems to be felt more vividly and more exuberantly by men who have sinned much, than by men who have grown up consistently from childhood with religious education. Rapture belongs to him whose sins, which are forgiven, are many.

In the perplexity which this fact occasions, there is a feeling which is partly right and partly wrong. There is a surprise which is natural. There is a resentful jealousy which is to be rebuked.

There is first of all a natural surprise. It was natural that the elder brother should feel perplexed and hurt. When a sinner seems to be rewarded with more happiness than a saint, it appears as if good and evil were alike undistinguished in God's dealings. It seems like putting a reconciled enemy

282 : The Prodigal and His Brother

over the head of a tried servant. It looks as if it were a kind of encouragement held out to sin, and a man begins to feel, Well, if this is to be the caprice of my father's dealing; if this rich feast of gladness be the reward of a licentious life, "Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency." This is natural surprise.

But besides this there is a jealousy in these sensations of ours which God sees fit to rebuke. You have been trying to serve God all your life, and find it struggle, and heaviness, and dullness still. You see another who has outraged every obligation of life, and he is not tried by the deep prostration you think he ought to have, but bright with happiness at once. You have been making sacrifices all your life, and your worst trials come out of your most generous sacrifices. Your errors in judgment have been followed by sufferings sharper than those which crime itself could have brought. And you see men who never made a sacrifice unexposed to trial—men whose life has been rapture purchased by the ruin of others' innocence—tasting first the pleasures of sin, and then the banquet of religion. You have been a moral man from childhood, and yet with all your efforts you feel the crushing conviction that it has never once been granted you to win a soul to God. And you see another man marked by inconsistency and impetuosity, banqueting every day upon the blest success of impressing and saving souls. All that is startling. And then come sadness and despondency; then come all those feelings which are so graphically depicted here: irritation—"he was angry;" swelling pride—"he would not go;" jealousy, which required soothing—"his father went out and entreated him."

And now, brethren, mark the father's answer. It does not account for this strange dealing by God's sovereignty. It does not cut the knot of the difficulty; instead of untying it, by saying, God has a *right* to do what He will. It does not urge, God has a right to act on favouritism if He please. But it assigns two reasons. The first reason is, "It was *meet*, right that we should make merry." It is meet that God should be glad on the reclamation of a sinner. It is

The Prodigal and His Brother : 283

meet that that sinner, looking down into the dreadful chasm over which he had been tottering, should feel a shudder of delight through all his frame on thinking of his escape. And it is meet that religious men should not feel jealous of one another, but freely and generously join in thanking God that others have got happiness, even if *they* have not. The spirit of religious exclusiveness, which looks down contemptuously instead of tenderly on worldly men, and banishes a man for ever from the circle of its joys because he has sinned notoriously, is a bad spirit.

Lastly, the reason given for this dealing is, "Son, thou art always with Me, and all that I have is thine." By which Christ seems to tell us that the disproportion between man and man is much less than we suppose. • The profligate had had one hour of ecstasy—the other had had a whole life of peace. A consistent Christian may not have rapture; but he has that which is much better than rapture: calmness—God's serene and perpetual presence. And after all, brethren, that is the best. One to whom much is forgiven has much joy. He must have it, if it were only to support him through those fearful trials which are to come—those haunting reminiscences of a polluted heart—those frailties—those inconsistencies to which the habit of past indulgence have made him liable. A terrible struggle is in store for him yet. Grudge him not one hour of unclouded exultation. But religion's best gift—rest, serenity—the quiet daily love of one who lives perpetually with his Father's family—uninterrupted usefulness—*that* belongs to him who has lived steadily, and walked with duty, neither grieving nor insulting the Holy Spirit of his God. The man who serves God early has the best of it; joy is well in its way, but a few flashes of joy are trifles in comparison with a life of peace. Which is best: the flash of joy lighting up the whole heart, and then darkness till the next flash comes—or the steady calm sun-light of day in which men work?

And now, one word to those who are living this young man's life—thinking to become religious as he did, when they have got tired of the world. I speak to those who are

284 The Prodigal and His Brother

leading what, in the world's softened language of concealment, is called a gay life. Young brethren, let two motives be urged earnestly upon your attention. The first is the motive of mere honourable feeling. We will say nothing about the uncertainty of life. We will not dwell upon this fact, that impressions resisted now, may never come back again. We will not appeal to terror. That is not the weapon which a Christian minister loves to use. If our lips were clothed with thunder, it is not denunciation which makes men Christians; let the appeal be made to every high and generous feeling in a young man's bosom. Deliberately and calmly you are going to do *this*; to spend the best and most vigorous portion of your days in idleness—in uselessness—in the gratification of self—in the contamination of others. And then weakness, the relics, and the miserable dregs of life;—you are going to give *that* sorry offering to God, because His mercy endureth for ever! Shame—shame upon the heart which can let such a plan rest in it one moment. If it be there, crush it like a man. It is a degrading thing to enjoy husks till there is no man to give them. It is a base thing to resolve to give to God as little as possible, and not to serve Him till you must.

Young brethren, I speak principally to you. You have health for God now. You have strength of mind and body. You have powers which may fit you for real usefulness. You have appetites for enjoyment which can be consecrated to God. You acknowledge the law of honour. Well, then, by every feeling of manliness and generosity remember this: now, and not later, is your time to learn what religion means.

There is another motive, and a very solemn one, to be urged upon those who are delaying. Every moment of delay adds bitterness to after struggles. The moment of a feeling of hired servitude must come. If a man will not obey God with a warm heart, he may hereafter have to do it with a cold one. To be holy is the work of a long life. The experience of ten thousand lessons teaches only a little

of it ; and all this, the work of becoming like God, the man who delays, is crowding into the space of a few years, or a few months. When we have lived long a life of sin, do we think that repentance and forgiveness will obliterate all the traces of sin upon the character? Be sure that every sin pays its price : "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." Oh ! there are recollections of past sin which come crowding up to the brain, with temptation in them. There are old habits which refuse to be mastered by a few enthusiastic sensations. There is so much of the old man clinging to the penitent who has waited long—he is so much, as a religious man, like what he was when he was a worldly man—that it is doubtful whether he ever reaches in this world the full stature of Christian manhood. Much warm earnestness, but strange inconsistencies, that is the character of one who is an old man and a young Christian. Brethren, do we wish to risk all this? Do we want to learn holiness with terrible struggles, and sore affliction, and the plague of much remaining evil? *Then* wait before you turn to God.

PARABLE OF THE SOWER

MATTHEW xiii. 1-10.—"The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the seaside. And great multitudes were gathered together unto him, so that he went into a ship, and sat ; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold a sower went forth to sow : And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the wayside, and the fowls came and devoured them up. Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth ; and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth : And when the sun was up, they were scorched ; and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns ; and the thorns sprung up and choked them : But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit some an hundred-fold, some sixty-fold, some thirty-fold. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear."

BEFORE the reception of the Lord's Supper on Sunday next, I have been anxious to address you, my young friends,

once more, in order to carry on the thoughts, and, if possible, deepen the impressions of Tuesday last. During the last few weeks, you have been subjected to much that is exciting; and in proportion to the advantage is the danger of that excitement. A great part of the value of the rite of Confirmation consists in its being a season of excitement or impression. The value of excitement is, that it breaks up the old mechanical life which has become routine. It stirs the stagnancy of our existence, and causes the stream of life to flow more fresh and clear. The danger of excitement is the probability of reaction. The heart, like the body and the mind, cannot be long exposed to extreme tension, without giving way afterwards. Strong impressions are succeeded by corresponding listlessness. Your work, to which you have so long looked forward, is done. The profession has been made; and now, left suddenly, as it were, with nothing before you, and apparently no answer to the question—"What are we to do now?"—insensibly you will feel that all is over, and the void within your hearts will be inevitably filled, unless there be great vigilance, by a very different class of excitements. This danger will be incurred most by those precisely who felt most deeply the services of the past week.

The parable I have selected dwells upon such a class of dangers.

No one who felt, or even thought, could view the scene of Tuesday last without emotion. Six or seven hundred young persons solemnly pledged themselves to renounce evil in themselves and in the world, and to become disciples of the Cross. The very colour of their garments, typical of purity, seemed to suggest the hope and the expectation that the day might come when they shall be found clothed with that inward righteousness, of which their dress was but a symbol, when they shall walk with Him in white, for they are worthy. As yet fresh in feeling, as yet untainted by open sin, who could see them without hoping that?

My young friends, experience forces us to correct that sanguine anticipation. Of the seven hundred who were

earnest then, it were an appalling question to ask how many will have retained their earnestness six months hence, and how much of all that which seemed so real, will be recognised as pure, true gold, at the last Great Day. Soon some will have lost their innocence—and some will have become frivolous and artificial—and the world will have got its cold deadening hand on some. Who shall dare to guess in how many the best raised hopes will be utterly disappointed?

Now, the question which presents itself is,—How comes so much promise to end in failure? And to this the parable of the sower returns a reply.

Three causes are conceivable: It might be the will—or, if you venture so, to call it—the fault of Him who gave the Truth: Or it might be some inherent impotency in the Truth itself: Or, lastly, the fault might lie solely in the soil of the heart.

This parable assures us that the fault does not lie in God, the sower. God does not predestinate men to fail. That is strikingly told in the history of Judas—"From a ministry and apostleship Judas fell, that he might go to his own place." The ministry and apostleship were that to which God had destined him. To work out that, was the destiny appointed to him, as truly as to any of the other apostles. He was called, elected to that. But when he refused to execute that mission, the very circumstances which, by God's decree, were leading him to blessedness, hurried him to ruin. Circumstances prepared by Eternal Love, became the destiny which conducted him to everlasting doom. He was a predestined man—crushed by his Fate. But he went to his "*own* place." He had shaped his own destiny. So the ship is wrecked by the winds and waves—hurried to its fate. But the winds and waves were in truth its best friends. Rightly guided, it would have made use of them to reach the port; wrongly steered, they became the destiny which drove it on the rocks. Failure—the wreck of life, is not to be impiously traced to the Will

of God. "God will have all men to be saved, and come to a knowledge of the Truth." God willeth not the death of a sinner.

Nor, again, can we find the cause in any impotency of Truth:—an impotency, doubtless, there is somewhere. The old thinkers accounted for it by the depravity of Matter. God can do anything, they said. Being good, God would do all good. If He do not, it is because of the materials He has to deal with. Matter thwarts Him: Spirit is pure, but Matter is essentially evil and unspiritual: the body is corrupt. Against this doctrine, St. Paul argues, 2 Cor. v. 4.

The true account is this,—God has created in man a will, which has become a curse. "God can do anything?"—I know not that. God cannot deny Himself—God cannot do wrong—God cannot create a number less than one—God cannot make a contradiction true. It is a contradiction to let man be free, and force him to do right. God has performed this marvel, of creating a Being with free-will, independent, so to speak, of Himself—a real cause in His universe. To say that He has created such a one, is to say that He has given him the power to fail. Without free-will there could be no human goodness. It is wise, therefore, and good in God, to give birth to free-will. But once acknowledge free-will in man, and the origin of evil does not lie in God.

And this leads us to the remaining cause of failure which is conceivable. In our own free-will—in the grand and fearful power we have to ruin ourselves—lies the real and only religious solution of the mystery. In the soil of the heart is found all the nutriment of spiritual life, and all the nutriment of the weeds and poisons which destroy spiritual life. And it is this which makes Christian character, when complete, a thing so inestimably precious. There are things precious, not from the materials of which they are made, but from the risk and difficulty of bringing them to perfection. The speculum of the largest telescope foils the optician's skill in casting. Too much or too little heat—

the interposition of a grain of sand, a slight alteration in the temperature of the weather, and all goes to pieces—it must be recast. Therefore, when successfully finished, it is a matter for almost the congratulation of a country. Rarer, and more difficult still than the costliest part of the most delicate of instruments, is the completion of Christian character. Only let there come the heat of persecution—or the cold of human desertion—a little of the world's dust—and the rare and costly thing is cracked, and becomes a failure.

In this parable are given to us the causes of failure ; and the requirements which are necessary in order to enable impressions to become permanent.

I. The causes of failure.

1. The first of these is want of spiritual perception. Some of the seed fell by the wayside. There are persons whose religion is all outside—it never penetrates beyond the intellect. Duty is recognised in word—not felt. They are regular at church—understand the Catechism and Articles—consider the Church a most venerable institution—have a respect for religion—but it never stirs the deeps of their being. They feel nothing in it beyond a safeguard for the decencies and respectabilities of social life: valuable, as parliaments and magistrates are valuable, but by no means the one awful question which fills the soul with fearful grandeur.

Truth of life is subject to failure in such hearts, in two ways,—By being trodden down: wheat dropped by a harvest-cart upon a road lies outside. There comes a passenger's foot, and crushes some of it ; then wheels come by—the wheel of traffic and the wheel of pleasure—crushing it grain by grain. It is “trodden down.”

The fate of religion is easily understood from the parallel fate of a single sermon. Scarcely has its last tone vibrated on the ear, when a fresh impression is given by the music which dismisses the congregation. That is succeeded by another impression, as your friend puts his arm in yours,

and talks of some other matter, irrelevant, obliterating any slight seriousness which the sermon produced. Another, and another, and another—and the word is *trodden down*. Observe, there is nothing wrong in these impressions. The farmer's cart which crushes the grain by the wayside is rolling by on rightful business—and the stage and the pedestrian are in their place—simply, the seed is not. It is not the wrongness of the impressions which treads religion down; but only this, that outside religion yields in turn to other outside impressions which are stronger.

Again, conceptions of religious life, which are only conceptions outward, having no lodgment in the heart, *disappear*. Fowls of the air came and devoured the seed. Have you ever seen grain scattered on the road? The sparrow from the housetop, and the chickens from the barn, rush in, and within a minute after it has been scattered, not the shadow of a grain is left. This is the picture: not of thought crushed by degrees—but of thought dissipated, and no man can tell when or how it went. Swiftly do these winged thoughts come, when we pray, or read, or listen; in our inattentive, sauntering, wayside hours: and before we can be upon our guard, the very trace of holier purposes has disappeared. In our purest moods, when we kneel to pray, or gather round the altar, down into the very Holy of Holies sweep these foul birds of the air, villain fancies, demon thoughts. The germ of life, the small seed of impression, is gone—where, you know not. But it is gone. Inattentiveness of spirit, produced by want of spiritual interest, is the first cause of disappointment.

2. A second cause of failure is want of depth in character. Some fell on stony ground. Stony ground means often the soil with which many loose stones are intermixed; but that is not the stony ground meant here: this stony ground is the thin layer of earth upon a bed of rock. Shallow soil is like superficial character. You meet with such persons in life. There is nothing deep about them—all they do and all they have is on the surface. The superficial servant's work is done: but not thoroughly—lazily, partially. The superficial

workman's labour will not bear looking into—but it bears a showy outside. The very dress of such persons betrays the slatternly, incomplete character of their minds. When religion comes in contact with persons of this stamp, it shares the fate of everything else. It is taken up in a superficial way.

There is deep knowledge of human nature and exquisite fidelity to truth in the single touch by which the impression of religion on them is described. The seed sprang up quickly; and then withered away as quickly, because it had no depth of root. There is a quick easily-moved susceptibility, that rapidly exhibits the slightest breath of those emotions which play upon the surface of the soul, and then as rapidly passes off. In such persons words are ever at command—voluble and impassioned words. Tears flow readily. The expressive features exhibit every passing shade of thought. Every thought and every feeling plays upon the surface—everything that is sown springs up at once with vehement vegetation. But slowness and inconstancy go together with violence. “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.” True; but also out of the emptiness of the heart the mouth can speak even more volubly. He who can always find the word which is appropriate and adequate to his emotions, is not the man whose emotions are deepest: warmth of feeling is one thing—permanence is another. On Tuesday last, they who went to the table most moved and touched were not necessarily those who raised in a wise observer's breast the strongest hope of persistence in the life of Christ. Rather those who were calm and subdued:—that which springs up quickly often does so merely from this, that it has no depth of earth to give it room to strike its roots down and deep.

A young man of this stamp came to Christ—running, kneeling, full of warm expressions, engaging gestures, and professed admiration, worshipping and saying, “Good Master!” Lovable and interesting as such always are—Jesus loved him. But his religion lay all upon the surface, withered away when the depth of its meaning was explored. The test of self-sacrifice was applied to his apparent love.

He was ready for anything. Well, "Go, sell that thou hast," "and he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions." It had sprung up quickly: but it withered because it had no root.

• And that is another stroke of truth in the delineation of this character. Not wealth nor comfort is the bane of its religion: but "When tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by they are offended." A pleasant, sunny religion would be the life to suit them. "They receive the Word with joy." So long as they have happiness they can love God—feel very grateful, and expand with generous emotions. But when God speaks to Job out of the whirlwind, and the sun is swept from the face of their heaven, and the sharp cross is the only object left in the dreary landscape, and the world blames, and friends wound the wounded with cold speech and hollow common-places: what is there in superficial religion to keep the heart in its place, and vigorous still?

Another point. Not without significance is it represented that the superficial character is connected with the hard heart. Beneath the light thin surface of easily stirred dust lies the bed of rock. The shallow ground was stony ground. And it is among the children of light enjoyment and unsettled life that we must look for stony heartlessness:—not in the world of business—not among the poor, crushed to the earth by privation and suffering. That hardens the character, but often leaves the heart soft. If you wish to know what hollowness and heartlessness are, you must seek for them in the world of light, elegant, superficial fashion—where frivolity has turned the heart into a rockbed of selfishness. Say what men will of the heartlessness of trade, it is nothing compared with the heartlessness of fashion. Say what they will of the atheism of science, it is nothing to the atheism of that round of pleasure in which many a heart lives: dead while it lives.

3. Once more, impressions come to nothing when the mind is subjected to dissipating influences, and yields to them. "Some fell among thorns."

There is nutriment enough in the ground for thorns, and enough for wheat ; but not enough, in any ground, for both wheat and thorns. The agriculturist thins his nursery-ground, and the farmer weeds his field, and the gardener removes the superfluous grapes, for that very reason : in order that the dissipated sap may be concentrated in a few plants vigorously.

So, in the same way, the heart has a certain power of loving. But love, dissipated on many objects, concentrates itself on none. God *or* the world—not both. “No man can serve two masters.” “If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” He that has learned many accomplishments or sciences, generally knows none thoroughly. Multifariousness of knowledge is commonly opposed to depth—variety of affections is generally not found with intensity.

Two classes of dissipating influences distract such minds. “The cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the Word.” The *cares* of this world—its petty trifling distractions—not wrong in themselves—simply dissipating—filling the heart with paltry solitudes and mean anxieties—*wearing*. Martha was “cumbered with much serving.” Her household and her domestic duties, real duties, divided her heart with Christ. The time of danger, therefore, is when life expands into new situations and larger spheres, bringing with them new cares. It is not in the earlier stages of existence that these *distractions* are felt. Thorns sprang up and choked the wheat as they grew together. You see a religious man taking up a new pursuit with eagerness. At first no danger is suspected. But it is a *distraction*—something that distracts or divides—he has become dissipated, and by and by you remark that his zest is gone—he is no longer the man he was. He talks as before—but the life is gone from what he says :—his energies are frittered. The Word is “choked.”

Again, the deceitfulness of riches dissipate. True as always to nature, never exaggerating, never one-sided : Christ does not say, that such religion brings forth no

fruit, but only that it brings none to perfection. A fanatic bans all wealth and all worldly care as the department of the devil,—Christ says, “How hardly shall they that *trust* in riches enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.” He does not say the divided heart has no religion, but that it is a dwarfed, stunted, feeble religion. Many such a Christian do you find among the rich and the titled, who, as a less encumbered man, might have been a resolute soldier of the Cross; but he is only now a realization of the old Pagan fable—a spiritual giant buried under a mountain of gold. Oh! many, many such we meet in our higher classes, pining with a nameless want, pressed by a heavy sense of the weariness of existence, strengthless in the midst of affluence, and incapable even of tasting the profusion of comfort which is heaped around them.

There is a way God their Father has of dealing with such which is no pleasant thing to bear. In agriculture it is called *weeding*. In gardening it is done by pruning. It is the cutting off the over-luxuriant shoots, in order to call back the wandering juices into the healthier and more living parts. In religion it is described thus,—“Every branch that beareth fruit He purgeth.” . . . Lot had such a danger, and was subjected to such a treatment. A quarrel had arisen between Abraham’s herdsmen and his. It was necessary to part. Abraham, in that noble way of his, gave him the choice of the country when they separated. Either hand for Abraham: either the right hand or the left:—what cared the Pilgrim of the Invisible for fertile lands or rugged sands? Lot chose wisely, as they of the world speak. Well, if this world be all:—he got a rich soil—became a prince, had kings for his society and neighbours. It was nothing to Lot that “the men of the land were sinners before the Lord exceedingly”—enough that it was well watered everywhere. But his wife became enervated by voluptuousness, and his children tainted with ineradicable corruption—the moral miasma of the society wherein he had made his home. Two warnings God gave him—First, his home and property were spoiled by the enemy; then

came the fire from heaven; and he fled from the cities of the plain a ruined man. His wife looked back with lingering regret upon the splendid home of her luxury and voluptuousness, and was overwhelmed in the encrusting salt: his children carried with them into the new world the plague-spot of that profligacy which had been the child of affluence and idleness; and the spirit of that rain of fire—of the buried Cities of the Plain—rose again in the darkest of the crimes which the Old Testament records, to poison the new society at its very fountain. And so the old man stood at last upon the brink of the grave, a blackened ruin scathed by lightning, over the grave of his wife, and the shame of his family—saved, but only so as by fire.

It is a painful thing, that weeding work. "Every branch in me that beareth fruit, He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit." The keen edge of God's pruning-knife cuts sheer through. No weak tenderness stops Him whose love seeks Goodness, not Comfort, for His servants. A man's distractions are in his wealth—and perhaps fire or failure make him bankrupt: what he feels is God's sharp knife. Pleasure has dissipated his heart, and a stricken frame forbids his enjoying pleasure—shattered nerves and broken health wear out the life of life. Or perhaps it comes in a sharper, sadder form: the shaft of death goes home—there is heard the wail of danger in his home. And then, when sickness has passed on to hopelessness, and hopelessness has passed on to death, the crushed man goes into the chamber of the dead; and there, when he shuts down the lid upon the coffin of his wife, or the coffin of his child, his heart begins to tell him the meaning of all this. Thorns had been growing in his heart, and the sharp knife has been at work making room—but by an awful desolation—tearing up and cutting down, that the Life of God in the soul may not be choked.

II. For the permanence of religious impressions this parable suggests three requirements: "They on the good ground are, they which, in an honest and good heart,

having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience."

1. "An honest and good heart." Earnestness: that is, sincerity of purpose. Now, sincerity is reckoned, by an exaggeration, sometimes the only virtue. So that a man be sincere, they say, it matters little what he thinks or what he is: but in Truth is the basis of all goodness; without which goodness of any kind is impossible. There are faults more heinous, but none more ruinous, than insincerity. Subtle minds, which have no broad firm footing in reality, lose everything by degrees, and may be transformed into any shape of evil: may become guilty of anything, and excuse it to themselves. To this sincerity is given, in the parable, success: A harvest thirty-fold, sixty-fold, an hundred-fold.

This earnestness is the first requisite for real success in everything. Do you wish to become rich? You may become rich:—that is, if you desire it in no half-way, but thoroughly. A miser sacrifices all to this single passion; hoards farthings, and dies possessed of wealth. Do you wish to master any science or accomplishment?—Give yourself to it, and it lies beneath your feet. Time and pains will do anything. This world is given as the prize for the men in earnest; and that which is true of this world is truer still of the world to come. "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." Only there is this difference. In the pursuit of wealth, knowledge, or reputation, circumstances have power to mar the wisest schemes. The hoard of years may be lost in a single night. The wisdom hived up by a whole life may perish when some fever impairs memory. But in the kingdom of Christ, where inward character is the prize, no chance can rob earnestness of its exactly proportioned due of success. "*Whatsoever* a man soweth, that shall he also reap." There is no blight, nor mildew, nor scorching sun, nor rain-deluge, which can turn that harvest into a failure. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth." . . . Sow for time, and *probably* you will succeed in time. Sow the

seeds of Life—Humbleness, Pure-heartedness, Love ; and in the long Eternity which lies before the soul, every minutest grain shall come up again with an increase of thirty, sixty, or an hundred-fold.

2. Meditation is a second requisite for permanence. They *keep* the word which they have heard.

Now, meditation is often confounded with something which only partially resembles it. Sometimes we sit in a kind of day-dream, the mind expatiating far away into vacancy, whilst minutes and hours slip by, almost unmarked, in mere vacuity. This is not meditation, but reverie,—a state to which the soul resigns itself in pure passivity. When the soul is absent and dreaming, let no man think that that is spiritual meditation, or anything that is spiritual.

Meditation is partly a passive, partly an active state. Whoever has pondered long over a plan which he is anxious to accomplish, without distinctly seeing at first the way, knows what meditation is. The subject itself presents itself in leisure moments spontaneously: but then all this sets the mind at work—contriving, imagining, rejecting, modifying. It is in this way that one of the greatest of English engineers, a man uncouth and unaccustomed to regular discipline of mind, is said to have accomplished his most marvellous triumphs. He threw bridges over almost impracticable torrents, and pierced the eternal mountains for his viaducts. Sometimes a difficulty brought all the work to a pause: then he would shut himself up in his room, eat nothing, speak to no one, abandon himself intensely to the contemplation of that on which his heart was set; and at the end of two or three days, would come forth serene and calm, walk to the spot, and quietly give orders which seemed the result of superhuman intuition. This was meditation.

He knows, again, what it is, who has ever earnestly and sincerely loved one living human being. The image of his friend rises unbidden by day and night, stands before his soul in the street and in the field, comes athwart his every thought, and mixes its presence with his every plan. So far all is passive. But, besides this, he plans and contrives

for that other's happiness—tries to devise what would give pleasure—examines his own conduct and conversation, to avoid that which can by any possibility give pain. This is meditation.

So, too, is meditation on religious truths carried on. If it first be loved, it will recur spontaneously to the heart.

But then it is dwelt on till it receives innumerable applications—is again and again brought up to the sun and dried in various lights, and so incorporates itself with the realities of practical existence.

• Meditation is done in silence. By it we renounce our narrow individuality, and expatiate into that which is infinite. Only in the sacredness of inward silence does the soul truly meet the secret, hiding God. The strength of resolve, which afterwards shapes life and mixes itself with action, is the fruit of those sacred, solitary moments. There is a divine depth in silence. We meet God alone.

For this reason, I urged it upon so many of you to spend the hours previous to your Confirmation separate from friends, from books, from everything human, and to force yourselves into the Awful Presence.

Have we never felt how human presence, if frivolous, in such moments frivolises the soul, and how impossible it is to come in contact with any thoughts which are sublime, or drink in one inspiration which is from Heaven, without degrading it, even though surrounded by all that would naturally suggest tender and awful feeling, when such are by?

It is not the number of books you read; nor the variety of sermons which you hear; nor the amount of religious conversation in which you mix: but it is the frequency and the earnestness with which you meditate on these things, till the truth which may be in them becomes your own, and part of your own being, that ensures your spiritual growth.

3. The third requisite is endurance. "They bring forth fruit with patience." Patience is of two kinds. There is an active and there is a passive endurance. The former is a masculine, the latter for the most part a feminine virtue.

Female patience is exhibited chiefly in fortitude ; in bearing pain and sorrow meekly without complaining. In the old Hebrew life, female endurance shone almost as brightly as in any life which Christianity itself can mould. Hannah, under the provocations and taunts of her rival, answering not again her husband's rebuke, humbly replying to Eli's unjust blame, is true to the type of womanly endurance. For ~~the~~ type of man's endurance you may look to the patience of the early Christians under persecution. They came away from the Sanhedrim to endure and bear ; but it was to bear as conquerors rushing on to victory, preaching the truth with all boldness, and defying the power of the united world to silence them. These two diverse qualities are joined in One, and only One of woman born, in perfection. One there was in whom human nature was exhibited in all its elements symmetrically complete. One in whom, as I lately said, there met all that was manliest and all that was most womanly. His endurance of pain and grief was that of the woman rather than the man. A tender spirit dissolving into tears, meeting the dark hour not with the stern defiance of the man and the stoic, but with gentleness, and trust, and love, and shrinking like a woman. But when it came to the question in Pilate's judgment-hall, or the mockeries of Herod's men of war, or the discussion with the Pharisees, or the exposure of the hollow falsehoods by which social, domestic, and religious life were sapped, the woman has disappeared, and the hardy resolution of the Man, with more than manly daring, is found in her stead. This is the "patience" for us to cultivate : To bear and to persevere. However dark and profitless, however painful and weary existence may have become, however any man like Elijah may be tempted to cast himself beneath the juniper-tree and say, "It is enough : now, O Lord !" life is not done, and our Christian character is not won, so long as God has anything left for us to suffer, or anything left for us to do.

Patience, however, has another meaning. It is the opposite of that impatience which cannot wait. This is

one of the difficulties of spiritual life. We are disappointed if the harvest do not come at once.

Last Tuesday, doubtless, you thought that all was done, and that there would be no more falling back.

Alas! a little experience will correct that. If the husbandman, disappointed at the delay which ensues before the blade breaks the soil, were to rake away the earth to examine if germination were going on, he would have a poor harvest. He must have "long patience, till he receive the early and the latter rain." The winter frost must mellow the seed lying in the genial bosom of the earth: the rains of spring must swell it, and the suns of summer mature it. So with you. It is the work of a long life to become a Christian. Many, oh! many a time, are we tempted to say, "I make no progress at all. It is only failure after failure. *Nothing grows." Now look at the sea when the flood is coming in. *Go and stand by the sea-beach, and you will think that the ceaseless flux and reflux is but retrogression equal to the advance. But look again in an hour's time, and the whole ocean has advanced. Every advance has been beyond the last, and every retrograde movement has been an imperceptible trifle less than the last. This is progress: to be estimated at the end of hours, not minutes. And this is *Christian* progress. Many a fluctuation—many a backward motion with a rush at times so vehement that all seems lost:—but if the Eternal work be real, every failure has been a real gain, and the next does not carry us so far back as we were before. Every advance is a real gain, and part of it is never lost. Both when we advance and when we fail, we gain. We are nearer to God than we were. The flood of spirit-life has carried us up higher on the everlasting shores, where the waves of life beat no more, and its fluctuations end, and all is safe at last. "This is the faith and patience of the saints."

It is because of the second of these requirements, Meditation, that I am anxious we should meet on Sunday next for an early Communion, at eight o'clock. I desire

The Unjust Steward .301

that the candidates may have a more solemn and definite Communion of their own, with few others present except their own relations and friends. In silence and quietness, we will meet together then. •Before the world has put on its full robe of light, and before the busy gay crowd have begun to throng our streets,—before the distractions of the day begin, we will consecrate the early freshness of our souls—untrodden, unhardened, undissipated—to God. •We will meet in the simplicity of brotherhood and sisterhood. We will have Communion in a sacred meal, which shall exhibit as nearly as may be the idea of family affection. Ye that are beginning life, and we who know something of it—ye that offer yourselves for the first time at that table, and we who, after sad experience and repeated failure, still desire again to renew our aspirations and our vows to Him—we will come and breathe together that prayer, which I commended to you at your Confirmation,—“Our Father, which art in Heaven, lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.”

THE UNJUST STEWARD

LUKE xvi. 8, 9,—“And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely : for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.—And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness ; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.”

THERE is at first sight a difficulty in the interpretation of this parable ; apparently there is a commendation of evil by Christ. We see a bad man is held up for Christian imitation. Now let us read the parable.

“And He said also unto His disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward ; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods.—And he

302 · The Unjust Steward

called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward.—Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed.—I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.—So he called every one of his lord's debtors unto him and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord?—And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty.—Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore.—And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely; for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.”

The difficulty we have spoken of passes away when we have learnt to distinguish the essential aim of the parable from its ornament or drapery. There is in every parable the main scope, and the ornament or drapery. Sometimes, if we press too closely the drapery in which the aim and intention of a parable is clothed, we get quite the contrary of our Redeemer's meaning. For example, in the parable of the Unjust Judge there is the similarity, that both God and the unjust judge yield to importunate prayer; but there is this difference, that the judge does it from weariness, and God from love. The judge grants the widow's request, lest, he says, “by her continual coming she weary me;”—and God answers the petitions of His people from Love: and encourages earnestness and sincerity in prayer because it brings man nearer to Him, elevating and ennobling him, while it makes him feel his entire dependence on God.

So here in this parable: it is the lord—it is not Christ, but the master—who commended the unjust steward. And he did so, not because he had acted honourably, faithfully, gratefully, but because he had acted *wisely*. He takes the single point of prudence, foresight, forecast. •

Let us consider the possibility of detaching a single quality from a character, and viewing it separately.

So do we speak in every-day life. We quote a passage admiringly, from an infidel writer—for example, Gibbon; but thereby we do not approve his infidelity. We may admire the manly bearing of a prisoner in the dock or on the scaffold while we reprobate the crime which brought him there. We may speak enthusiastically of a great philosopher; we do not therefore say he is a great man, or a good man. Perhaps we are charmed by a tale of successful robbery; we wonder at its ingenuity, its contrivance, feel even a kind of respect for the man who could so contrive it: but no man who thus relates it is understood to recommend felony. We admire the dexterity of a juggler *as* dexterity.

So it was with this parable of Christ. He fastened on a single point, excluding all other considerations. The man had planned, he had seen difficulties, overcome them, marked out his path, held to it steadily, crowned himself with success. So far he is an example. The way in which he used his power of forecasting may have been bad; but forecast itself is good. Our subject to-day includes:—

- I. The wisdom of this world.
- II. The pattern of Christian consistency.

I. The wisdom of this world. There are three classes of men. Those who believe that one thing is needful, and choose the better part, who believe in and live for eternity;—these are not mentioned here: those who believe in the world, and live for it: and those who believe in eternity, and half live for the world.

Forethought for self made the steward ask himself, “What shall I do?” Here is the thoughtful, contriving, sagacious man of the world. In the affairs of this world, the man who does not provide for self, if he entered into competition with the world on the world’s principles, soon finds himself thrust aside; he will be put out. It becomes necessary to jostle and struggle in the great crowd if he would thrive. With

him it is not, first the kingdom of God ; but first, what he shall eat, and what he shall drink, and wherewithal shall he be clothed.

Note the kind of superiority in this character that is commended. There are certain qualities which really do elevate a man in the scale of being. He who pursues a plan steadily is higher than he who lives by the hour. You cannot but respect such an one. The value of self-command and self-denial is exemplified in the cases of the diplomatist who masters his features while listening ; the man of pleasure who is prudent in his pleasures ; the man of the world who keeps his temper and guards his lips. How often, after speaking hastily the thought which was uppermost, and feeling the cheek burn, you have looked back in admiration on some one who held his tongue even though under great provocation to speak.

Look at some hard-headed, hard-hearted man, with a front of brass, carrying out his worldly schemes with a settled plan, and a perseverance which you perforce must admire. There may be nothing very exalted in his aim, but there is something very marvellous in the enduring, patient, steady pursuit of his object.

You see energies of the highest order are brought into play. It is not a being of mean powers that the world has beguiled, but a mind far-reaching, vast ; throwing immortal powers on things of time ; on a scheme, perhaps, which breaks up like a cloud phantom, or melts like an ice-palace.

It is a marvellous spectacle—a man reaching forward to secure a habitation, a home, that will last. A man counting his freehold more his own than the pension for life : sagacious, meeting with entire success : the success which always attends consistency in any pursuit. If a tradesman resolve to save and be frugal, barring accidents, he will realize a competency or a fortune. If you make it your business to please, you will be welcome in society. So we find it in this parable. This man, one of the world, contrived to secure for himself a home. And the children

of this world are consistent, and force the world to yield them a home. It is no use saying the people of the world are not happy.

I shall now endeavour to explain this parable. The term "steward" is not to be taken exactly in its modern meaning. The tenants paid their rents, not in money, but in kind, that is in produce, and the rent was a certain proportion of the crop, and would therefore vary according to the harvest. Say, for illustration, the landlord—here called "the lord"—received as rent the tenth part of the crop; then, if the produce of an olive yard was a thousand measures of oil, "the lord" was entitled to a hundred measures. And similarly in the case of an arable farm, a rent of a hundred measures of wheat would represent a crop of a thousand measures. According to the parable it appears that it depended on the good faith of the tenant to state truly the amount gathered in; and against false returns the chief check was provided in the steward. If he acquiesced in the deception, there was generally no detection or check. We read in this case he permitted the bill to be taken, and an account given, in the one instance of eight hundred, in the other, of five hundred instead of a thousand measures. Thus he got gratitude from the tenants, who considered him a benevolent man, and counted his expulsion an injustice. We have here a specimen of the world's benevolence and the world's gratitude. Let us do the world justice. Gratitude is given profusely. Help a man to build his fortune, and you will win gratitude.

The steward got commendation from his lord for his worldly wisdom. Such is the wisdom of this world—wise in its contriving selfishness; wise in its masterly superiority; wise in its adaptation of means to ends; wise in its entire success.

But the success is only in their generation, and their wisdom is only for their generation. If this world be all, it is wise to contrive for it, and live for it. But if not, then consider,—the word is, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee; then whose shall those things be that thou hast gotten?"

II. In contrast with the wisdom of the children of this world, the Redeemer shows the inconsistencies of the children of light. "The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light."

This is evidently not true of all. There have been men who have given their bodies to be burned for the truth's sake; men who have freely sacrificed this present world for the next. To say that the wisest of the sons of this world is half as wise as they, were an insult to the sanctifying Spirit.

But "children of light" is a wide term. There is a difference between Life and Light. To have Light is to perceive truth and know duty. To have Life is to be able to live out truth and to perform duty. Many a man has clear light who has not taken hold of life. Many a man is the child of light who does not walk as the child of life.

So far as a man feels that eternity is long, time short, so far he is a child of light. So far as he believes the body nothing in comparison with the soul, the present in comparison with the future; so far as he has felt the power of sin, and the sanctifying power of the death of Christ; so far as he comprehends the character of God as exhibited in Jesus Christ,—he is a child of light.

Now the accusation is, that in his generation he does not walk so wisely as the child of the world does in his. The children of the world believe that this world is of vast importance. They are consistent with their belief, and live for it. Out of it they manage to extract happiness. In it they contrive to find a home.

To be a child of light implies duty as well as privilege. It is not enough to have the light, if we do not "walk in the light." "If we say we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth."

And to hold high principles and live on low ones is Christian inconsistency. We are all more or less inconsistent. There is no man whose practice is not worse than his profession. No one who does not live below his own

standard. But absolute inconsistency is, when a man's life, taken as a whole, is in opposition to his acknowledged views and principles. If a man say that "it is more blessed to give than to receive," and is for ever receiving, scarcely ever giving, he is inconsistent. If he profess that to please God is the only thing worth living for, and his plans, and aims, and contrivances are all to please men, he is wise for the generation of the children of the world; for the generation of the "children of light" he is not wise.

See, then, the contrast.

The wisdom of the steward consisted in forecasting. He felt that his time was short, and he lost not a moment. Every time he crossed a field it was with the feeling, This is no longer mine. Every time he left his house he felt, I shall soon leave it to come back no more. Every time he went into a tenant's cottage he felt, the present is all that may be given me to make use of this opportunity. Therefore, he says with despatch, "Take thy bill, and write down."

Now the want of Christian wisdom consists in this, that our stewardship is drawing to a close, and no provision is made for an eternal future. We are all stewards. Every day, every age of life, every year, gives us superintendence over something which we have to use, and the use of which tells for good or evil on eternity.

Childhood and manhood pass. The day passes: and, as its close draws near, the Master's voice is heard—"Thou mayest be no longer steward." And what are all these outward symbols but types and reminders of the darker, longer night that is at hand? One by one, we are turned out of all our homes. The summons comes. The man lies down on his bed for the last time; and then comes that awful moment, the putting down the extinguisher on the light, and the grand rush of darkness on the spirit.

Let us now consider our Saviour's application of this parable.

"And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may

receive you into everlasting habitations.—He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much : and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.—If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?—And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?"

There are two expressions to be explained.

1. "Mammon of unrighteousness."

Mammon is the name of a Syrian god, who presided over wealth. Mammon of unrighteousness means the god whom the unrighteous worship—wealth.

It is not necessarily gold. Any wealth; wealth being weal or well-being. Time, talents, opportunity, and authority, all are wealth. Here the steward had influence.

It is called the mammon of unrighteousness, because it is ordinarily used, not well, but ill. Power corrupts men. Riches harden more than misfortune.

2. "Make friends of." This is an ambiguous expression. Those who know it to be so scarcely are aware how widely it is misunderstood. To make friends of has, in English, two meanings. To make friends of a man, in our idiom, is to convert him into our ally. We meet with those who imagine that the command is to make riches our friends instead of our enemies.

But the other meaning is "of," *i. e.* out of, by the use of, to create friends,—in a word, to use these goods of Time in such a way as to secure Eternal well-being.

"Make to yourselves friends." I will explain "friends" as a home. There may seem to be great legality in this injunction.

Yet on this subject the words of Scripture are very strong. "Sell that thou hast, and give unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven." "Provide yourselves bags that wax not old; a treasure in the heavens, that fadeth not away." "Lay up for yourselves treasure in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal." Do not be afraid of the

expression. Let it stand in all its bold truthfulness. Goodness done in Christ secures blessedness. A cup of cold water, given in the name of Christ, shall not lose its reward.

Merit in these things there is none. Oh, the man who knows the torment of an evil heart!—and the man who is striving to use his powers wisely, is not the man to talk of merit in the sight of God. There is no truth more dear to our hearts than this—not by merit, but by grace, does heaven become ours.

But let us put it in another way. Wise acts, holy and unselfish deeds, secure friends. Wherever the steward went he found a friend. The acts of his beneficence were spread over the whole of his master's estate. Go where he would, he would receive a welcome. In this way our good actions become our friends.

And if it be no dream which holy men have entertained, that on this regenerated earth the risen spirits shall live again in gloried bodies, then it were a thing of sublime anticipation, to know that every spot hallowed by the recollection of a deed done for Christ, contains a recollection which would be a friend. Just as the patriarchs erected an altar when they felt God to be near, till Palestine became dotted with these memorials, so would earth be marked by a good man's life with those holiest of all friends, the remembrance of ten thousand little nameless acts of piety and love.

Lastly, they are *everlasting* habitations.

If the children of the world be right, it is not all well with them; but if the children of light be right, it is well everlastingly.

Nothing is eternal but that which is done for God and others. That which is done for self dies. Perhaps it is not wrong: but it perishes. You say it is pleasure, well—enjoy it. But joyous recollection is no longer joy. That which ends in self is mortal; that alone which goes out of self into God lasts for ever.

310. The Scepticism of Pilate

THE SCEPTICISM OF PILATE

JOHN xviii. 38.—“Pilate saith unto him, What is truth?”

THE lesson which we are to draw from this verse must depend upon the view we take of the spirit in which the words were spoken. Some of the best commentators conceive them to have been words of mockery; and such is the great Lord Bacon's view. “‘What is truth?’ said jesting Pilate, and would not wait for a reply.”

In all deference to such authority, we cannot believe that this sentence was spoken in jest. In Pilate's whole conduct there is no trace of such a tone. It betrays throughout much of uncertainty, nothing of lightness. He was cruelly tormented with the perplexity of efforts to save his prisoner. He risked his own reputation. He pronounced Him, almost with vehemence, to be innocent. He even felt awe, and was afraid of Him. In such a frame of mind, mockery was impossible.

Let us try to comprehend the character of the man who asked this question. His character will help us to judge the tone in which he asked. And his character, the character of his mind and life, are clear enough from the few things recorded of him. He first hears what the people have to say; then asks the opinion of the priests—then comes back to Jesus—goes again to the priests and people—lends his ear—listens to the ferocity on the one hand, and feels the beauty on the other, balancing between them; and then he becomes bewildered, as a man of the world is apt to do, who has had no groundwork of religious education, and hears superficial discussions on religious matters, and superficial charges, and superficial slanders, till he knows not what to think. What could come out of such procedure? Nothing but that cheerlessness of soul to which certainty respecting

The Scepticism of Pilate 311

anything and everything here on earth² seems unattainable. This is the exact mental state which we call scepticism.

Out of that mood, when he heard the enthusiast before him speak of a Kingdom of the Truth, there broke a sad, bitter, sarcastic sigh, "What is Truth?" Who knows anything about it? Another discoverer of the undiscoverable! *Jesting* Pilate! with Pilate the matter was beyond a jest. It was not a question put for the sake of information: for he went immediately out, and did not stay for information. It was not put for the sake of ridicule, for he went out to say, "I find no fault in Him." Sarcasm there was perhaps: but it was that mournful, bitter sarcasm which hides inward unrest in sneering words: that sad irony whose very laugh rings of inward wretchedness.

We shall pursue, from this question of Pilate, two lines of thought.

I. The causes of Pilate's scepticism.

II. The way appointed for discovering what is Truth.

I. The causes; and among these I name—

1st. Indecision of character.

Pilate's whole behaviour was a melancholy exhibition. He was a thing set up for the world's pity. See how he acts: he first throws the blame on the priests—and then acknowledges that all responsibility is his own: washes his hands before the multitude, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this just person. See ye to it." And then—"Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and power to release thee?" He pronounces Jesus innocent; and then, with wondrous inconsistency, delivers Him to be scourged: yields Him up to be crucified, and then tries every underhand expedient to save Him.

What is there in all this but vacillation of character lying at the root of unsettledness of opinion? Here is a man knowing the right and doing the wrong—not willing to do an act of manifest injustice if he can avoid it, but hesitating to prevent it, for fear of a charge against himself—pitifully vacillating because his hands were tied by the consciousness

312. The Scepticism of Pilate

of past guilt and personal danger. How could such a man be certain about anything? What could a mind, wavering, unstable, like a feather on the wind, know or believe of solid, stable truth, which altered not, but remaineth like a rock amidst the vicissitudes of the ages and the changeful fashions of the minds of men? "A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways." "He that is of the truth, heareth the voice of truth." To the untrue man all things are untrue. To the vacillating man, who cannot know his own mind, all things seem alterable, changeful, unfixed; just as to the man tossed at sea, all things motionless in themselves seem to move round, upwards, downwards, or around, according to his own movements.

2nd, Falsehood to his own convictions.

Pilate had a conviction that Jesus was innocent. Instead of acting at once on that, he went and parleyed. He argued and debated till the practical force of the conviction was unsettled.

Now let us distinguish: I do not say that a man is never to re-examine a question once settled. A great Christian, whose works are very popular, has advised that when a view has once been arrived at as true, it should be as it were laid on the shelf, and never again looked on as an open question: but surely this is false. A young man of twenty-three, with such light as he has, forms his views: is he never to have more light? Is he never to open again the questions which his immature mind has decided on once? Is he never, in manhood, with manhood's data and manhood's experience, to modify, or even reverse, what once seemed the very Truth itself? Nay, my brethren—the weak pride of consistency, the cowardice which dares not say I have been wrong all my life, the false anxiety which is fostered to be true to our principles rather than to make sure that our principles are true, all this would leave in Romanism the man who is born a Romanist. It is not so: the best and bravest have struggled from error into truth: they listened to their honest doubts, and tore up their old beliefs by the very roots.

The Scepticism of Pilate 313

Distinguish, however. A man may unsettle the verdict of his intellect: it is at his peril that he tampers with the convictions of his conscience. Every opinion and view must remain an open question, freely to be tried with fresh light. But there are Eternal Truths of Right and Wrong, such as the plain moralities and instinctive decencies of social life, upon which it is perilous to argue. There are plain cases of immediate duty where it is only safe to act at once.

Now Pilate was false to his *conscience*. His conviction was that Jesus was innocent. It was not a matter of speculation or probability at all, nor a matter in which fresh evidence was even expected, but a case sifted and examined thoroughly. The Pharisees are persecuting a guiltless man. His claims to royalty are not the civil crime which they would make out. Every charge has fallen to the ground. The clear mind of the Roman Procurator saw that, as in sunlight, and he did not try to invalidate that judicial conviction. He tried to get rid of the clear duty which resulted from it. Now it is a habit such as this which creates the temper of scepticism.

I address men of a speculative turn of mind. There is boundless danger in all inquiry which is merely curious. When a man brings a clear and practised intellect to try questions, by the answer to which he does not mean to rule his conduct, let him not marvel if he feels, as life goes on, a sense of desolation; existence a burden, and all uncertain. It is the law of his human nature which binds him; for truth is for the heart rather than the intellect. If it is not *done* it becomes unreal—as gloomily unreal and as dreamily impalpable as it was to Pilate.

3rd, The third cause of Pilate's scepticism was the taint of the worldly temper of his day. Pilate had been a public man. He knew life: had mixed much with the world's business, and the world's politics: had come across a multiplicity of opinions, and gained a smattering of them all. He knew how many philosophies and religions pretended to an exclusive possession of Truth; and how the pretensions of each were overthrown by another. And his incredulity was

314 · The Scepticism of Pilate

but a specimen of the scepticism fashionable in his day. The polished scepticism of a polished, educated Roman, a sagacious man of the world, too much behind the scenes of public life to trust professions of goodness or disinterestedness, or to believe in enthusiasm and a sublime life. And his merciful language, and his desire to save Jesus, was precisely the liberalism current in our day as in his—an utter disbelief in the truths of a world unseen, but at the same time an easy, careless toleration, a half-benevolent, half-indolent unwillingness to molest the poor dreamers who chose to believe in such superstitions.

This is the superficial liberalism which is contracted in public life. Public men contract a rapid way of discussing and dismissing the deepest questions: never going deep: satisfied with the brilliant flippancy which treats religious beliefs as phases of human delusion, seeing the hollowness of the characters around them, and believing that all is hollow: and yet not without their moments of superstition, as when Pilate was afraid, hearing of a Son of God, and connecting it doubtless with the heathen tales of gods who had walked this earth in visible flesh and blood; which he had laughed at, and which he now for one moment suspected might be true: not without their moments of horrible insecurity, when the question, "What is truth?" is not a brilliant sarcasm, but a sarcasm on themselves, on human life, on human nature, wrung out of the loneliest and darkest bewilderment that can agonize a human soul.

To such a character Jesus would not explain His Truth. He gave no reply: He held His peace. God's Truth is too sacred to be expounded to superficial worldliness in its transient fit of earnestness.

4th, Lastly, I assign, as a cause of scepticism, that priestly bigotry which forbids inquiry and makes doubt a crime.

The priests of that day had much to answer for. Consider for a moment the state of things. One—of whom *they* only knew that He was a man of unblemished life—came forward to proclaim the Truth. But it was new: they had

never heard such views before : they were quite sure *they* had never taught such, nor sanctioned such : and so they settled that the thing was heresy. He had no accredited ordination. "We know that, God spake to Moses : as for this fellow we know not whence He is." Then they proceeded to bind that decision upon others. A man was heard, to say, "Why, what evil hath He done?" Small offence enough, but it savoured of a dangerous candour towards a suspected man ; and in the priestly estimate, candour is the next step to heresy. "Thou wast altogether born in sin, and dost Thou teach us? and they cast Him out of the synagogue." And so again with Pilate : they stifled his soul's rising convictions with threats and penalties,—“If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend.”

This was what they were always doing : they forbade all inquiry, and made doubt of their decision a crime.

Now the results of this priestcraft were twofold. The first result was seen in the fanaticism of the people who cried for blood : the second, in the scepticism of Pilate.

And these are the two results which come from all claims to infallibility, and all prohibition of inquiry. They make bigots of the feeble-minded who cannot think : cowardly bigots, who at the bidding of their priests or ministers swell the ferocious cry which forces a government, or a judge, or a bishop, to persecute some opinion which they fear and hate ; turning private opinion into civil crime : and they make sceptics of the acute intellects which, like Pilate see through their fallacies, and like Pilate, too, dare not publish their misgivings.

And it matters not in what form that claim to infallibility is made : whether in the clear, consistent way in which Rome asserts it, or whether in the inconsistent way in which churchmen make it for their church, or religious bodies for their favourite opinions : wherever penalties attach to a conscientious conviction, be they the penalties of the rack and flame, or the penalties of being suspected, and avoided, and slandered, and the slur of heresy affixed to the name, till all men count him dangerous lest they too should be

316 . . The Scepticism of Pilate

put out of the synagogue—and let every man who is engaged in persecuting any opinion ponder it: these two things must follow—you make fanatics, and you make sceptics; believers you cannot make.

Therefore do we stand by the central protest and truth of Protestantism. There is infallibility nowhere on this earth: not in Rome; not in councils or convocations; not in the Church of England; not in priests; not in ourselves. The soul is thrown in the grandeur of a sublime solitariness on God. Woe to the spirit that stifles its convictions, when priests threaten and the mob which they have maddened cries heresy, and insinuates disloyalty, "Thou art not Cæsar's friend."

II. The mode appointed for discovering the reply to the question, "What is Truth?"

Observe—I do not make our second division that which might seem the natural one—what Truth is. I am not about to be guilty of the presumption of answering the question which Jesus did not answer. Some persons hearing the text might think it to be the duty of any man who took it as a text to preach upon, to lay down what Truth is: and if a minister were so to treat it, he might give you the fragment of Truth which his own poor mind could grasp: and he might call it as the phrase is, *The Truth*, or *The Gospel*: and he might require his hearers to receive it on peril of salvation. And then he would have done as the priests did; and they who lean on other minds would have gone away bigoted: and they who think would have smiled sadly, bitterly, or sarcastically; and gone home to doubt still more, "What *is* truth, and is it to be found?"

No, my brethren! The Truth cannot be compressed into a sermon. The reply to Pilate's question cannot be contained in any verbal form. Think you, that if Christ Himself could have answered that question in a certain number of sentences, He would have spent thirty years of life in witnessing to it? Some men would compress into the limits of one reply, or one discourse the Truth which it

The Scepticism of Pilate . . . 317

took Christ thirty years to teach, and which He left unfinished for the Spirit to complete.

One word. The Truth is infinite as the firmament above you. In childhood, both seem near and measurable: but with years they grow and grow; and seem further off, and further and grander, and deeper and vaster, as God Himself; till you smile to remember how you thought you could touch the sky, and blush to recollect the proud and self-sufficient way in which you used to talk of knowing or preaching "The Truth."

And once again: the Truth is made up of principles: an inward Life, not any formula of words. God's Character: Spiritual worship: the Divine Life in the Soul. How shall I put that into sentences ten or ten thousand? "The words which I speak unto you, they are Truth, and they are *Life*." How could Pilate's question be answered except by a Life? The Truth, then, which Pilate wanted—which you want, and I want—is not the boundless verities, but Truth of inward life. Truth for me: Truth enough to guide me in this darkling world: enough to teach me how to live and how to die.

Now—the appointed ways to teach this Truth. They are three: Independence—Humbleness—Action.

First, Independence. Let no man start, as if independence savoured of presumption. Protestant independence, they tell us, is pride and self-reliance: but in truth it is nothing more than a deep sense of personal responsibility; a determination to trust in God rather than in man to teach; in God and God's light in the soul. You choose a guide among precipices and glaciers: but you walk for yourself: you judge his opinion, though more experienced than your own: you overrule it if needs be: you use your own strength: you rely on your own nerves. That is independence.

You select your own physician, deciding upon the respective claims of men, the most ignorant of whom knows more of the matter than you. You prudently hesitate at times to follow the advice of the one you trust most,

318. . The Scepticism of Pilate

yet that is only independence without a particle of presumption.

And so precisely in matters of religious Truth. No man cares for your health as you do: therefore you rely blindly upon none. No man has the keeping of your own soul or cares for it as you do. For yourself, therefore, you inquire and think, and you refuse to delegate that work to bishop, priest, or church. "Call they that presumption?" Oh! the man who knows the awful feeling of being alone, and struggling for Truth as for life and death—he knows the difference between independence and presumption.

Second, Humbleness. There is no infallibility in man—
if so, none in us. *We* may err: that one thought is enough to keep a man humble.

There are two kinds of temper contrary to this spirit. The first is a disputing, captious temper. Disagreement is refreshing when two men lovingly desire to compare their views to find out the truth. Controversy is wretched when it is an attempt to prove one another wrong. Therefore Christ would not *argue* with Pilate. Religious controversy does only harm. It destroys the humble inquiry after truth: it throws all the energies into an attempt to prove ourselves right. The next temper contrary is a hopeless spirit. Pilate's question breathed of hopelessness. He felt that Jesus was unjustly condemned, but he thought Him in views as hopelessly wrong as the rest—all were wrong. What was truth? Who knew anything about it? He spoke too bitterly—too hopelessly—too disappointedly to get an answer. In that despairing spirit no man gets at truth: "*The meek will He guide in judgment. . . .*"

Lastly, Action. This was Christ's rule—"If any man will *do* His will. . . ." A blessed rule: a plain and simple rule. Here we are in a world of mystery, where all is difficult, and very much dark—where a hundred jarring creeds declare themselves to be The Truth, and all are plausible. How shall a man decide? Let him *do* the right that lies before him: much is uncertain—some things at least are clear. Whatever else may be wrong, it must be

right to be pure—to be just and tender, and merciful and honest. It must be right to love, and to deny one's-self. Let him do the Will of God, and he shall know. Observe—men begin the other way. They say, If I could but believe, then I would make my life true. If I could but be sure what is truth, then I would set to work to live in earnest. No—God says, Act—make the life true, and then you will be able to believe. Live in earnest, and you will know the answer to “What is Truth?”

Infer the blessedness of belief. Young men are prone to consider scepticism a proof of strong-mindedness—a something to be proud of. Let Pilate be a specimen—and a wretched one he is. He had clear-mindedness enough to be dissatisfied with all the views he knew: enough to see through and scorn the squabbles and superstitions of priests and bigots. All well: if from doubt of falsehood he had gone on to a belief in a higher truth. But doubt, when it left him doubting—why, the noblest opportunity man ever had, that of saving the Saviour, he missed: he became a thing for the people to despise, and after-ages to pity. And that is scepticism. Call you that a manly thing?

To believe is to be happy: to doubt is to be wretched. But I will not urge that. Seventy years and the most fevered brain will be still enough. We will not say much of the wretchedness of doubt. To believe is to be *strong*. Doubt cramps energy. Belief is power: only so far as a man believes strongly, mightily, can he act cheerfully, or do anything that is worth the doing.

I speak to those who have learned to hold cheap the threats wherewith priests and people would terrify into acquiescence—to those who are beyond the appeal of fear, and can only yield, if at all, to higher motives. Young men! the only manly thing, the only strong thing, is Faith. It is not so far as a man doubts, but so far as he believes, that he can achieve or perfect anything. “All things are possible to *him that believeth*.”

320 The Doubt of Thomas

THE DOUBT OF THOMAS

JOHN xx. 29.—“Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed : blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.”

THE day on which these words were spoken was the first day of the week. On that day Thomas received demonstration that his Lord was risen from the dead. On that same day a week before, Thomas had declared that no testimony of others, no eyesight of his own, nothing short of touching with his hands the crucifixion marks in his Master's body, should induce him to believe a fact so unnatural as the resurrection of a human being from the grave. Those seven days between must therefore have been spent in a state of miserable uncertainty. How miserable and how restless none can understand but those who have felt the wretchedness of earnest doubt.

Doubt moreover, observe, respecting all that is dear to a Christian's hopes. For if Christ were not risen, Christianity was false, and every high aspiration which it promised to gratify, was thrown back on the disappointed heart.

Let us try to understand the doubt of Thomas. There are some men whose affections are stronger than their understandings : they feel more than they think. They are simple, trustful, able to repose implicitly on what is told them—liable sometimes to verge upon credulity and superstition, but take them all in all, perhaps the happiest class of minds : for it is happy to be without misgivings about the love of God and our own eternal rest in Him. “Blessed,” said Christ to Thomas, “are they that have believed.”

There is another class of men whose reflective powers are stronger than their susceptible : they think out truth—they do not feel it out. Often highly gifted and powerful minds, they cannot rest till they have made all their grounds certain : they do not feel safe as long as there is one

The Doubt of Thomas 321

possibility of delusion left: they prove all things. Such a man was Thomas. He has well been called the rationalist among the apostles. Happy such men cannot be. An anxious and inquiring mind dooms its possessor to unrest. But men of generous spirit, manly and affectionate, they may be: Thomas was. When Christ was bent on going to Jerusalem, to certain death, Thomas said, "Let us go up too, that we may die with Him." And men of mighty faith they may become, if they are true to themselves and their convictions: Thomas did. When such men do believe, it is belief with all the heart and soul for life. When a subject has been once thoroughly and suspiciously investigated, and settled once for all, the adherence of the whole reasoning man, if given in at all, is given frankly and heartily as Thomas gave it—"My Lord, and my God."

Now this question of a Resurrection which made Thomas restless, is the most anxious that can agitate the mind of man. So awful in its importance, and out of Christ so almost desperately dark in its uncertainty, who shall blame an earnest man severely if he crave the most indisputable proofs?

Very clearly Christ did not. Thomas asked of Christ a sign: he must put his own hands into the prints. His Master gave him that sign or proof. He said, "Reach hither thy hand." He gave it, it is true, with a gentle and delicate reproof—but He did give it. Now from that condescension, we are reminded of the darkness that hangs round the question of a Resurrection, and now excusable it is for a man to question earnestly until he has got proof to stand on. For if it were not excusable to crave a proof, our Master never would have granted one. Resurrection is not one of those questions on which you can afford to wait: it is the question of life and death. There are times when it does not weigh heavily. When we have some keen pursuit before us: when we are young enough to be satisfied to enjoy ourselves—the problem does not press itself. We are too laden with the pressure of the present, to care to ask what is coming. But at last a time comes when we feel it

322 The Doubt of Thomas

will be all over soon—that much of our time is gone, and the rest swiftly going. And let a man be as frivolous as he will at heart, it is a question too solemn to be put aside—Whether he is going down into extinction and the blank of everlasting silence or not. Whether in those far ages, when the very oak which is to form his coffin shall have become fibres of black mould, and the churchyard in which he is to lie shall have become perhaps unconsecrated ground, and the spades of a generation yet unborn shall have exposed his bones, those bones will be the last relic in the world to bear record that he once trod this green earth, and that life was once dear to him, Thomas, or James, or Paul. Or whether that thrilling, loving, thinking something, that he calls himself, has indeed within it an indestructible existence which shall still be conscious, when everything else shall have rushed into endless wreck. Oh, in the awful earnestness of a question such as that, a speculation and a peradventure will not do: we must have proof. The honest doubt of Thomas craves a sign as much as the cold doubt of the Sadducee. And a sign shall be mercifully given to the doubt of love which is refused to the doubt of indifference.

This passage presents two lines of thought.

I. The naturalness of the doubts of Thomas, which partly excuses them.

II. The evidences of the Christian Resurrection.

I. The naturalness of the doubts of Thomas.

The first assertion that we make to explain those doubts is, that Nature is silent respecting a future life. All that Reason, all that Nature, all that Religion, apart from Christ, have to show us is something worse than darkness. It is the twilight of excruciating uncertainty. There is enough in the riddle of this world to show us that there *may* be a life to come; there is nothing to make it certain that there *will* be one. We crave as Thomas did, a sign either in the height above or in the depth beneath, and the answer seems to fall back like ice upon our hearts—there shall no sign be given you.

It is the uncertainty of twilight. You strain at something in the twilight, and just when you are beginning to make out its form and colour, the light fails you, and your eyelid sinks down, wet and wearied with the exertion. Just so it is when we strain into Nature's mysteries, to discern the secrets of the Great Hereafter. Exactly at the moment when we think we begin to distinguish something, the light goes out and we are left groping in darkness—the darkness of the grave.

Let us forget for a moment that we ever heard of Christ :—what is there in Life or Nature to strengthen the guess that there is a life to come? There are hints—there are probabilities—there is nothing more. Let us examine some of those probabilities.

First, there is an inexpressible longing in our hearts. We *wish* for immortality. The thought of annihilation is horrible : even to conceive it is almost impossible. The wish is a kind of argument : it is not likely that God would have given all men such a feeling, if He had not meant to gratify it. Every natural longing has its natural satisfaction. If we thirst, God has created liquids to gratify thirst. If we are susceptible of attachments, there are beings to gratify that love. If we thirst for life and love eternal, it is likely that there are an eternal life and an eternal love to satisfy that craving.

Likely, I say : more we cannot say. A likelihood of an immortality of which our passionate yearnings are a presumption, nothing higher than a likelihood. And in weary moments, when the desire of life is not strong, and in unloving moments, there is not even a likelihood.

Secondly, corroborating this feeling we have the traditions of universal belief. There is not a nation, perhaps, which does not in some form or other hold that there is a country beyond the grave where the weary are at rest. Now that which all men everywhere and in every age have held, it is impossible to treat contemptuously. How came it to be held by all, if only a delusion? Here is another probability in the universality of belief. And yet when you come to estimate this, it is too slender for a proof :—it is only a

324 The Doubt of Thomas

presumption. The universal voice of mankind is not infallible. It was the universal belief once on the evidence of the senses that the earth was stationary:—the universal voice was wrong. The universal voice might be wrong in the matter of a resurrection. It might be only a beautiful and fond dream, indulged till hope made itself seem to be a reality. You cannot build upon it.

Once again—In this strange world of perpetual change, we are met by many resemblances to a resurrection. Without much exaggeration we call them resurrections. There is the resurrection of the moth from the grave of the chrysalis. For many ages the sculptured butterfly was the type and emblem of immortality. Because it passes into a state of torpor or deadness, and because from that it emerges by a kind of resurrection—the same, yet not the same—in all the radiance of a fresh and beautiful youth, never again to be supported by the coarse substance of earth, but destined henceforth to nourish the etherealized existence on the nectar of the flowers—the ancients saw in that transformation a something added to their hopes of immortality. It was their beautiful symbol of the soul's indestructibility.

Again, there is a kind of resurrection when the spring brings vigour and motion back to the frozen pulse of the winter world. Let any one go into the fields at this spring season of the year. Let him mark the busy preparations for life which are going on. Life is at work in every emerald bud, in the bursting bark of every polished bough, in the greening tints of every brown hillside. A month ago everything was as still and cold as the dead silence which chills the heart in the highest regions of the glacier solitudes. Life is coming back to a dead world. It is a resurrection surely! The return of freshness to the frozen world is not less marvellous than the return of sensibility to a heart which has ceased to beat. If one has taken place, the other is not impossible.

And yet all this, valuable as it is in the way of suggestiveness, is worth nothing in the way of proof. It is worth everything to the heart, for it strengthens the dim guesses

and vague intimations which the heart had formed already. It is worth nothing to the intellect : for the moment we come to argue the matter, we find how little there is to rest upon in these analogies. They are no real resurrections after all : they only look like resurrections. The chrysalis only *seemed* dead : the tree in winter only seemed to have lost its vitality. Show us a butterfly which has been dried and crushed, fluttering its brilliant wings next year again. Show us a tree plucked up by the roots and seasoned by exposure, the vital force really killed out, putting forth its leaves again, then we should have a real parallel to a resurrection. But nature does not show us that. So that all we have got in the butterfly and the spring are illustrations exquisitely in point *after* immortality is proved, but in themselves no proofs at all.

Further still. Look at it in another point of view, and it is a dark prospect. Human history behind and human history before, both give a stern "No," in reply to the question--Shall we rise again?

Six thousand years of human existence have passed away ; countless armies of the dead have set sail from the shores of time. No traveller has returned from the still land beyond. More than one hundred and fifty generations have done their work, and sunk into the dust again, and still there is not a voice ; there is not a whisper from the grave to tell us whether indeed those myriads are in existence still. Besides, why should they be? Talk as you will of the grandeur of man, why should it not be honour enough for him, more than enough to satisfy a thing so mean, to have had his twenty or his seventy years' life-rent of God's universe? Why must such a thing, apart from proof, rise up and claim to himself an exclusive immortality? Man's majesty ! man's worth ! the difference between him and the elephant or ape is too degradingly small to venture much on. That is not all : instead of looking backwards, now look forwards. The wisest thinkers tell us that there are already on the globe traces of a demonstration that the human race is drawing to its

326 'The Doubt of Thomas

close. Each of the great human families has had its day—its infancy—its manhood—its decline. The two last races that have not been tried are on the stage of earth doing their work now. There is no other to succeed them. Man is but of yesterday, and yet his race is well-nigh done. Man is wearing out as everything before him has been worn out. In a few more centuries the crust of earth will be the sepulchre of the race of man, as it has been the sepulchre of extinct races of palm-trees, and ferns, and gigantic reptiles. The time is near when the bones of the last human being will be given to the dust. It is historically certain that man has quite lately within a few thousand years been called into existence. It is certain that before very long the race must be extinct.

Now look at all this without Christ, and tell us whether it be possible to escape such misgivings and such reasonings as these which rise out of such an aspect of things. Man, this thing of yesterday, which sprung out of the eternal nothingness, why may he not sink after he has played his appointed part into nothingness again? You see the leaves sinking one by one in autumn, till the heaps below are rich with the spoils of a whole year's vegetation. They were bright and perfect while they lasted: each leaf a miracle of beauty and contrivance. There is no resurrection for the leaves—why must there be one for man? Go and stand some summer evening by the river-side: you will see the mayfly sporting out its little hour, in dense masses of insect life, darkening the air a few feet above the gentle swell of the water. The heat of that very afternoon brought them into existence. Every gauze wing is traversed by ten thousand fibres which defy the microscope to find a flaw in their perfection. The Omniscience and the care bestowed upon that exquisite anatomy, one would think cannot be destined to be wasted in a moment. Yet so it is: when the sun has sunk below the trees, its little life is done. Yesterday it was not: to-morrow it will not be. God has bidden it be happy for one evening. It has no right or

The Doubt of Thomas. 327.

claim to a second, and in the universe that marvellous life has appeared once and will appear no more. May not the race of man sink like the generations of the mayfly? Why cannot the Creator, so lavish in His resources, afford to annihilate souls as He annihilates insects?

Would it not almost enhance His glory to believe it?

That brethren, is the question; and Nature has no reply. The fearful secret of sixty centuries has not yet found a voice. The whole evidence lies before us. We know what the greatest and wisest have had to say in favour of an immortality; and we know how, after eagerly devouring all their arguments, our hearts have sunk back in cold disappointment, and to every proof as we read, our lips have replied mournfully, that will not stand. Search through tradition, history, the world within you and the world without,—except in Christ there is not the shadow of a shade of proof that man survives the grave.

I do not wonder that Thomas, with that honest accurate mind of his, wishing that the news were true, yet dreading lest it should be false, and determined to guard against every possible illusion, delusion, and deception, said so strongly, "Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe."

II. The Christian proofs of a Resurrection.

This text tells us of two kinds of proof: The first is the evidence of the senses—"Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed." The other is the Evidence of the Spirit—"Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."

Let us scrutinize the external evidence of Christ's resurrection which those verses furnish. It is a twofold evidence: The witness of the Apostle Thomas, who was satisfied with the proofs—the witness of St. John, who records the circumstance of his satisfaction. Consider first the witness of St. John: try it by ordinary rules. Hearsay evidence, which comes secondhand, is suspicious, but St. John's is no

328 The Doubt of Thomas

distant hearsay story. He does not say that he had heard the story from Thomas, and that years afterwards, when the circumstances had lost their exact sharp outline, he had penned it down, when he was growing old and his memory might be failing. John was present the whole time. All the apostles were there: they all watched the result with eager interest. The conditions made by Thomas, without which he would not believe, had been made before them all. They all heard him say that the demonstration was complete: they all saw him touch the wounds: and St. John recorded what he saw. Now a scene like that, is one of those solemn ones in a man's life which cannot be forgotten: it graves itself on the memory. A story told us by another may be unintentionally altered or exaggerated in the repetition; but a spectacle like this, so strange and so solemn, could not be forgotten or misinterpreted. St. John could have made no mistake. Estimate next the worth of the witness of Thomas: try it by the ordinary rules of life. Evidence is worth little if it is the evidence of credulity. If you find a man believing every new story, and accepting every fresh discovery so called, without scrutiny, you may give him credit for sincerity; you cannot rest much upon his judgment: his testimony cannot go for much. For example, when St. Peter, after his escape from prison, knocked at Mark's mother's door, there went a maid to open it, who came back scared and startled with the tidings that she had seen his angel or spirit. Had she gone about afterwards among the believers with that tale, that St. Peter was dead and alive again, it would have been worth little. Her fears, her sex, her credulity, all robbed her testimony of its worth.

Now the Resurrection of Christ does not stand on such a footing. There was one man who dreaded the possibility of delusion, however credulous the others might be. He resolved beforehand that only one proof should be decisive. He would not be contented with seeing Christ: that might be a dream: it might be the vision of a disordered fancy. He would not be satisfied with the assurance of others. The evidence of testimony which he did reject was very

strong. Ten of his most familiar friends and certain women, gave in their separate and their united testimony; but against all that St. Thomas held out sceptically firm. They might have been deceived themselves: they might have been trifling with him. The possibilities of mistake were innumerable: the delusions of the best men about what they see are incredible. He would trust a thing so infinitely important to nothing but his own scrutinizing hand. It might be some one personating his Master. He would put his hands into real wounds, or else hold it unproved. The allegiance which was given in so enthusiastically, "My Lord and my God," was given in after, and not before scrutiny. It was the cautious verdict of an enlightened, suspicious, most earnest, and most honest sceptic.

Try the evidence next by character. Blemished character damages evidence. Now the only charge that was ever heard against the Apostle John was that he loved a world which hated him. The character of the Apostle Thomas is that he was a man cautious in receiving evidence and most rigorous in exacting satisfactory proof, but ready to act upon his convictions when once made, even to the death. Love, elevated above the common love of man, in the one—heroic conscientiousness and a most rare integrity in the other—who impeaches that testimony?

Once more—any possibility of interested motives will discredit evidence. Ask we the motive of John or Thomas for this strange tale? John's reward,—a long and solitary banishment to the mines of Patmos. The gain and the bribe which tempted Thomas,—a lonely pilgrimage to the far East, and death at the last in India. Those were strange motives to account for their persisting and glorying in the story of the Resurrection to the last! Starving their gain, and martyrdom their price.

The evidence to which Thomas yielded was the evidence of the senses—touch, and sight, and hearing. Now the feeling which arose from this touching, and feeling, and demonstration, Christ pronounced to be faith: "Thomas,

330. The Doubt of Thomas

because thou hast seen, thou hast believed." There are some Christian writers who tell us that the conviction produced by the intellect or the senses is not faith: but Christ says it is. Observe then, it matters not *how* faith comes—whether through the intellect, as in the case of St. Thomas—or through the heart, as in the case of St. John—or as the result of long education, as in the case of St. Peter. God has many ways of bringing different characters to faith: but that blessed thing which the Bible calls faith is a *state* of soul in which the things of God become glorious certainties. It was not faith which assured Thomas that what stood before him was the Christ he had known: that was sight. But it was faith, which from the visible enabled him to pierce up to the truth invisible: "My Lord, and my God." And it was faith which enabled him through all life after, to venture everything on that conviction, and live for One who had died for him.

Remark again this: The faith of Thomas was not merely satisfaction about a fact: it was trust in a Person. The admission of a fact, however sublime, is not faith: we may believe that Christ is risen, yet not be nearer heaven. It is a Bible fact that Lazarus rose from the grave, but belief in Lazarus's resurrection does not make the soul better than it was. Thomas passed on from the fact of the resurrection to the Person of the risen: "My Lord, and my God." Trust in the risen Saviour—that was the belief which saved his soul.

And that is our salvation too. You may satisfy yourself about the evidences of the resurrection; you may bring in your verdict well, like a cautious and enlightened judge; you are then in possession of a fact; a most valuable and curious fact: but faith of any saving worth you have not, unless from the fact you pass on like Thomas, to cast the allegiance and the homage of your soul, and the love of all your being, on Him whom Thomas worshipped. It is not belief about the Christ, but personal trust in the Christ of God, that saves the soul.

There is another kind of evidence by which the Resur-

The Doubt of Thomas 331

rection becomes certain. Not the evidence of the senses, but the evidence of the spirit: "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." There are thousands of Christians who have never examined the evidences of the Resurrection piece by piece: they are incapable of estimating it if they did examine: they know nothing about the laws of evidence: they have had no experience in balancing the value of testimony: they are neither lawyers nor philosophers: and yet these simple Christians have received into their very souls the Resurrection of their Redeemer, and look forward to their own rising from the grave with a trust as firm, as steady, and as saving, as if they had themselves put their hands into His wounds.

They have never seen—they know nothing of proofs and miracles—yet they believe, and are blessed. How is this?

I reply, there is an inward state of heart which makes truth credible the moment it is stated. It is credible to some men because of what they are. Love is credible to a loving heart: purity is credible to a pure mind: life is credible to a spirit in which ever life beats strongly: it is incredible to other men. Because of that such men believe. Of course that inward state could not *reveal* a fact like the Resurrection; but it can *receive* the fact the moment it is revealed without requiring evidence. The love of St. John himself never could discover a resurrection; but it made a resurrection easily believed, when the man of intellect, St. Thomas, found difficulties. Therefore with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and therefore he that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself, and therefore Faith is the substance of things hoped for. Now it is of such a state, a state of love and hope, which makes the Divine truth credible and natural at once, that Jesus speaks: "Blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed."

There are men in whom the Resurrection begun makes the Resurrection credible. In them the Spirit of the risen Saviour works already; and they have mounted with Him from the grave. They have risen out of the darkness of

332. The Doubt of Thomas

doubt, and are expatiating in the brightness and the sunshine of a Day in which God is ever Light. Their step is as free as if the clay of the sepulchre had been shaken off: and their hearts are lighter than those of other men; and there is in them an unearthly triumph which they are unable to express. They have risen above the narrowness of life, and all that is petty, and ungenerous, and mean. They have risen above fear—they have risen above self. In the New Testament that is called the spiritual Resurrection, a being risen with Christ: and the man in whom all that is working has got something more blessed than external evidence to rest upon. He has the witness in himself: he has not seen, and yet he has believed: he believed in a resurrection, because he has the resurrection in himself. The Resurrection in all its heavenliness and unearthly elevation has begun within his soul, and he knows as clearly as if he had demonstration, that it must be developed in an eternal life.

Now this is the higher and nobler kind of faith—a faith more blessed than that of Thomas. "Because thou hast seen Me, *thou* hast believed." There are times when we envy, as possessed of higher privileges, those who saw Christ in the flesh: we think that if we could have heard that calm Voice, or seen that blessed Presence, or touched those lacerated wounds in His sacred flesh, all doubt would be set at rest for ever. Therefore these words must be our corrective. God has granted us the possibility of believing in a more trustful and more generous way than if we *saw*. To believe, not because we are learned and can prove, but because there is a something in us, even God's own Spirit, which makes us feel Light as light, and Truth as true—that is the blessed faith.

Blessed, because it carries with it spiritual elevation of character. Narrow the prospects of man to this time-world, and it is impossible to escape the conclusion of the Epicurean sensualist. If to-morrow we die, let us eat and drink to-day. If we die the sinner's death, it becomes a matter of mere taste whether we shall live the sinner's life or not.

The Last Utterances of Christ 333

But if our existence is for ever, then plainly, that which is to be daily subdued and subordinated is the animal within us : that which is to be cherished is that which is likest God within us,—which we have from Him, and which is the sole pledge of eternal being in the spirit-life.

THE LAST UTTERANCES OF CHRIST

JOHN xix. 30.—“When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished : and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.”

THERE are seven dying sentences of our Lord's recorded in the Gospels ; one recorded conjointly by St. Matthew and St. Mark, three recorded by St. Luke, and three by St. John. That recorded by the first two Evangelists is, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me ?” Those preserved by St. Luke only are, “Verily, I say unto thee, to-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise ;” “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do ;” and, “Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit.” The three recorded by St. John are these—“I thirst ;” “Behold thy mother ; behold thy son :” and lastly, “It is finished.” And these seven group themselves into two divisions : we perceive that some of them are the utterances of personal feeling, and others are the utterances of sympathy for others.

These are, therefore, the two divisions of our subject to-day—First. The natural exclamations of the Man. Secondly. The utterances of the Saviour.

The first of those which we class under the exclamations of the Man, referring to His personal feelings, is, “I thirst ;” in answer to which they gave Him vinegar to drink. Now upon first reading this, we are often tempted to suppose, from the unnatural character of the draught, that an insult was intended ; and therefore we rank this among the taunts and fearful sufferings which He endured at His crucifixion. But as we become acquainted with Oriental history, we discover that this vinegar was the common drink of the Roman army,

334 The Last Utterances of Christ

their wine, and therefore was the most likely to be at hand when in the company of soldiers, as He then was. Let it be borne in mind that a draught was twice offered to Him; once it was accepted, once it was refused. That which was refused was the medicated potion—wine mingled with myrrh—the intention of which was to deaden pain, and therefore when it was presented to the Saviour it was rejected. And the reason commonly assigned for that seems to be the true one: the Son of Man would not meet death in a state of stupefaction, He chose to meet His God awake.

There are two modes in which pain may be struggled with—through the flesh, and through the spirit; the one is the office of the physician, the other that of the Christian. The physician's care is at once to deaden pain either by insensibility or specifics; the Christian's object is to deaden pain by patience. We dispute not the value of the physician's remedies, in their way they are permissible and valuable; but yet let it be observed that in these there is nothing moral; they may take away the venom of the serpent's sting, but they do not give the courage to plant the foot upon the serpent's head, and to bear the pain without flinching. Therefore the Redeemer refused, because it was not through the flesh, but through the Spirit, that He would conquer; to have accepted the anodyne would have been to escape from suffering, but not to conquer it. But the vinegar or sour wine was accepted as a refreshing draught, for it would seem that He did not look upon the value of the suffering as consisting in this, that He should make it as exquisite as possible, but rather that He should not suffer one drop of the cup of agony which His Father had put into His hand to trickle down the side untasted. Neither would He make to Himself one drop more of suffering than His Father had given.

There are books on the value of pain; they tell us that if of two kinds of food the one is pleasant and the other nauseous, we are to choose the nauseous one. Let a lesson on this subject be learned from the divine example of our Master.

The Last Utterances of Christ 335

To suffer pain for others without flinching, that is our Master's example ; but pain for the mere sake of pain, that is not Christian ; to accept poverty in order to do good for others, that is our Saviour's principle ; but to become poor for the sake and the merit of being poor, is but selfishness after all. Our Lord refused the anodyne that would have made the cup untasted which His Father had put into His hand to drink, but He would not taste one drop more than His Father gave Him. Yet He did not refuse the natural solace which His Father's hand had placed before Him.

There are some who urge most erroneously the doctrine of discipline and self-denial. If of two ways one is disagreeable, they will choose it, just because it is disagreeable ; because food is pleasant and needful, they will fast. There is in this a great mistake. To deny self for the sake of duty is right—to sacrifice life and interests rather than principle is right ; but self-denial for the mere sake of self-denial, torture for torture's sake, is neither good nor Christ-like. Remember, He drank the cooling beverage in the very moment of the Sacrifice ; the value of which did not consist in its being made as intensely painful as possible, but in His not flinching from the pain, when Love and Duty said, Endure.

His second exclamation was, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" We will not dive into the deep mysteries of that expression—we will not pretend to be wiser than what is written, endeavouring to comprehend where the Human is mingled with the Divine—we will take the matter simply as it stands. It is plain from this expression that the Son of God felt as if He had been deserted by His Father. We know that He was not deserted by Him, or else God had denied Himself, after saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." And they who maintain that this was real desertion, attribute that to the Lord of Love which can alone belong to Judas—the desertion of innocence—therefore we conclude that it arose from the infirmities of our Master's innocent human nature. It was the darkening of His human soul, not the hiding of God's countenance. He was worn, faint, and exhausted ; His body was hanging

336. The Last Utterances of Christ

from four lacerated wounds ; and more than that, there was much to perplex the Redeemer's human feelings, for He was suffering there, the innocent for the guilty. For once God's law seemed reversed ; and then came the human cry, " My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me ? "

And now, brethren, observe in this, that it arose apparently from the connection of the Redeemer's death with sin. When the death-struggle of the flesh begins, and we first become aware of the frailty of our Humanity, then the controversy of God with the soul is felt to be real by reason of our consciousness of sin ; then is felt, as it were, the immense gulf that separates between the pure and the impure. In the case of the Son of Man this was, of course, impossible ; consciousness of sin He had none, for He had no sin ; but there was a connection, so to speak, between the death of Christ and sin, for the Apostle says, " In that He died, He died unto sin once. " " He died unto sin ; " there was a connection between His death and sin, though it was not His own sin, but the sin of the whole world. In that moment of the apparent victory of evil, the Redeemer's spirit, as it would appear, felt a darkness similar to ours when sin has hidden our consciousness of God. When death is merely natural, we can feel that the hand of God is there ; but when man interferes, and the hand of God is invisible, and that of man is alone seen, then all seems dark and uncertain. The despondency of the Redeemer was not supernatural, but most natural darkness. The words He used were not His own, but David's words ; and this proclaims that suffering such as He was then bearing, had been borne before Him—the difference was in degree, not in kind. The idea of piety struggling with, and victorious over evil, had been exhibited on earth before. The idea was imperfectly exhibited in the sufferings of Israel regarded as typical of Christ. In Christ alone is it perfectly presented. So also that wondrous chapter, the fifty-third of Isaiah, justly describing both, belongs in its entirety to Christ. He therefore adopted these words as His own.

The Last Utterances of Christ 337

The last personal ejaculation of our Redeemer was, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." We take this in connection with the preceding ; for if we do not, the two will be unintelligible, but taking them together, it becomes plain that the darkness of the Redeemer's mind was but momentary. For a moment the Redeemer felt alone and deserted, and then, in the midst of it, He cried out, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." In that moment He realized His inseparable union with the Father.

And now I would observe, if I may do it without being misunderstood, that the Redeemer speaks as if not knowing where He was going—"Into Thy hands," that is sufficient. It is as well to look at these things as simply as possible. Do not confuse the mind with attempting to draw the distinction between the human and the Divine. He speaks here as if His human soul, like ours, entered into the dark unknown, not seeing what was to be in the Hereafter : and this is Faith, or, if it were not so, there arises an idea from which we shrink, as if He were speaking words He did not feel. We know nothing of the world beyond, we are like children ; even revelation has told us almost nothing concerning this, and an inspired apostle says, "We know not yet what we shall be." Then rises Faith, and dares to say, "My Father, I know nothing, but, be where I may, still I am with Thee." "Into Thy hands I commend my spirit." Therefore, and only therefore, do we dare to die."

We pass on, secondly, to the consideration of those utterances which our Master spake as the Saviour of the world. The first is, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." From this expression we infer two things : first, that sin needs forgiveness ; and, secondly, that forgiveness can be granted.

Sin needs forgiveness, or the Redeemer would not have so prayed. That it needs forgiveness we also prove, from the fact that it always connects itself with penalty. Years may separate the present from your past misconduct, but the remembrance of it remains ; nay, more than that, even

338 The Last Utterances of Christ

those errors which we did ignorantly, carry with them their retribution ; and from this we collect the fact that even errors, failures in judgment, need God's forgiveness. Another proof that sin needs pardon is from the testimony of conscience. In all men it speaks, in some in but a feeble whisper, in others with an irregular sound, now a lull, and then a storm of recollection ; in others, conscience is as a low perpetual knell, ever sounding, telling of the death going on within, proclaiming that the past has been accused, the present withered, and that the future is one vast terrible blank.

In these several forms, Conscience tells us also that the sin has been committed against our Father. The permanence of all our acts, the eternal consequences of every small thing done, by man, all point to God as the One against whom the sin is committed ; and, therefore, that Voice still speaks, though the thing we have done never can be undone. The other thing that we learn from that utterance of Christ is, that the pardon of sin is a thing possible, for the utterance of Christ was the expression of the Voice of God—it was but another form of the Father saying, "I can and I will forgive."

Remark here a condition imposed by Christ on the Divine forgiveness when He taught His disciples to pray. "If ye forgive men from your hearts, your Father will forgive you ; but if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive you." It is natural to forgive on a dying bed ; yet that forgiveness is only making a merit of necessity, for we can revenge ourselves no more. There is abundance of good-natured charity abroad in the world ; that charity which is indiscriminating. It may co-exist with the resentment of personal injury, but the spirit of forgiveness which we must have before we can be forgiven, can be ours only so far as our life is a representative of the life of Christ. Then it is possible for us to realize God's forgiveness.

The second utterance which our Lord spake for others rather than Himself was, "To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise."

The Last Utterances of Christ 339.

Now, what we have here to observe is the law of personal influence; the dying hour of Christ had an influence over one thief, he became converted. The first thing we remark is, that indirect influence often succeeds where direct influence has failed. Thus, when the Redeemer selected His disciples, and endeavoured to teach them His truth, that was direct influence; but when He prayed for them, and those disciples heard Him, and then came to Him with this petition, "Lord, teach us to pray," that was indirect influence; and so in this instance, while praying for Himself, He did influence the mind of the dying thief, though that influence was indirect. Indirect influence is often far more successful than that which is direct; and for this reason—the direct aims that we make to convert others may be contradicted by our lives, while the indirect influence is our very life. What we really are, somehow or other, will ooze out, in tone, in look, in act, and this tells upon those who come in daily contact with us. The law of personal influence is mysterious. The influence of the Son of God told on the one thief, not on the other; it softened and touched the hearts of two of His hearers, but it only hardened others. There is much to be learnt from this, for some are disposed to write bitter things against themselves because their influence on earth has failed. Let all such remember that some are too pure to act universally on others. If our influence has failed, the Redeemer's was not universal.

The third utterance of our Master on the Cross, for others, not for Himself, was, "Behold thy mother." He who was dying on the Cross, whose name was Love, was the great Philanthropist, whose charity embraced the whole human race. His last dying act was an act of individual attachment, tenderness towards a mother, fidelity towards a friend. Now, some well-meaning persons seem to think that the larger charities are incompatible with the indulgence of particular affections; and, therefore, all that they do, and aim at, is on a large scale, they occupy themselves with the desire to emancipate the whole mass of mankind.

340 The Last Utterances of Christ

But, brethren, it not unfrequently happens that those who act in this manner are but selfish after all, and are quite inattentive to all the fidelities of friendship and the amenities of social life. It was not so, if we may venture to say it, that the spirit of the Redeemer grew, for as he progressed in wisdom and knowledge, He progressed also in love. First, we read of His tenderness and obedience to His parents, then the selection of twelve to be near Him from the rest of the disciples, and then the selection of one, more especially as a friend. It was through this that, apparently, His human soul grew in grace and in love. And if it were not so with Him, at all events it must be so with us. It is in vain for a man in his dying hour, who has loved no man individually, to attempt to love the human race; everything here must be done by degrees. Love is a habit. God has given to us the love of relations and friends, the love of father and mother, brother, sister, friend, to prepare us gradually for the love of God; if there be one stone of the foundation not securely laid, the superstructure will be imperfect. The domestic affections are the alphabet of Love.

Lastly, our Master said, "It is finished," partly for others, partly for Himself. In the earliest part of His life, we read that He said, "I have a baptism to be baptized with;" to Him, as to every human soul, this life had its side of darkness and gloom, but all that was now accomplished: He has drunk His last earthly drop of anguish, He has to drink the wine no more till He drink it new in His Father's kingdom. It was finished; all was over; and with, as it were, a burst of subdued joy, He says, "It is finished."

There is another aspect in which we may regard these words, as spoken also for others. The way in which our Redeemer contemplated this life was altogether a peculiar one. He looked upon it, not as a place of rest or pleasure, but simply, solely, as a place of duty. He was here to do His Father's will, not His own; and therefore, now that life was closed, He looked upon it chiefly as a duty

Three Times in a Nation's History: 341

that was fulfilled. We have the meaning of this in the seventeenth chapter of this Gospel: "I have glorified Thee on earth, I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do." The duty is done, the work is finished. Let us each apply this to ourselves. That hour is coming to us all; indeed it is, perhaps, *now* come. The dark night settles down on each day.

"It is finished." We are *ever* taking leave of something that will not come back again. We let go, with a pang, portion after portion of our existence. However dreary we may have felt life to be here, yet when that hour comes—the winding-up of all things, the last grand rush of darkness on our spirits, the hour of that awful sudden wrench from all we have ever known or loved, the long farewell to sun, moon, stars, and light—Brother men, I ask you this day, and I ask myself, humbly and fearfully, *What* will then be finished? When it is finished, what will it be? Will it be the butterfly existence of pleasure, the mere life of science, a life of uninterrupted sin, and selfish gratification; or will it be, "Father, I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do?"

THREE TIMES IN A NATION'S HISTORY

LUKE xix. 41-44.—"And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it,—Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.—For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side,—And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation."

THE event of which we have just read took place in the last year of our Redeemer's life. For nearly four years He had been preaching the Gospel. His pilgrim life was drawing to a close; yet no one looking at the outward

342 Three Times in a Nation's History

circumstances of that journey would have imagined that He was on His way to die. It was far more like a triumphal journey, for a rejoicing multitude heralded His way to Jerusalem with shouts—"Hosanna to the Son of David." He trod, too, a road green with palm branches, and strewn with their garments; and yet in the midst of all this joy, as if rejoicing were not for Him, the Man of Sorrows paused to weep.

There is something significant and characteristic in that peculiar tone of melancholy which pervaded the Redeemer's intercourse with man. We read of but one occasion on which he rejoiced, and then only in spirit. He did not shrink from occasions of human joy, for He attended the marriage feast; yet even there the solemn remark, apparently out of place, was heard—"Mine hour is not yet come." There was in Him that peculiarity which we find more or less in all the purest, most thoughtful minds—a shade of melancholy; much of sadness; though none of austerity. For, after all, when we come to look at this life of ours, whatever may be its outward appearance, in the depths of it there is great seriousness; the externalities of it may seem to be joy and brightness, but in the deep beneath there is a strange, stern aspect. It may be that the human race is on its way to good, but the victory hitherto gained is so small that we can scarcely rejoice over it. It may be that human nature is progressing, but that progress has been but slowly making, through years and centuries of blood. And therefore contemplating all this, and penetrating beyond the time of the present joy, the Redeemer wept, not for Himself, but for that devoted city.

He was then on the Mount of Olives; beneath Him there lay the metropolis of Judæa, with the Temple in full sight; the towers and the walls of Jerusalem flashing back the brightness of an Oriental sky. The Redeemer knew that she was doomed, and therefore with tears He pronounced her coming fate: "The days shall come that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and shall not leave in thee one stone upon another." These words, which rang

Three Times in a Nation's History : 343

the funeral knell of Jerusalem, tell out in our ears this day a solemn lesson ; they tell us that in the history of nations, and also, it may be, in the personal history of individuals, there are Three Times,—a time of grace, a time of blindness, and a time of judgment.

This, then, is our subject,—the Three Times in a Nation's history. When the Redeemer spake, it was for Jerusalem the time of blindness ; the time of grace was past ; that of judgment was to come.

We take these three in order : first, the time of grace. We find it expressed here in three different modes : first, "in this thy day ;" then, "the things which belong to thy peace ;" and thirdly, "the time of thy visitation." And from this we understand the meaning of a time of grace ; it was Jerusalem's time of opportunity. The time in which the Redeemer appeared was that in which faith was almost worn out. He found men with their faces turned backward to the past, instead of forward to the future. They were as children clinging to the garments of a relation they have lost ; life there was not, faith there was not—only the garments of a past belief. He found them groaning under the dominion of Rome ; rising up against it, and thinking it their worst evil.

The coldest hour of all the night is that which immediately precedes the dawn, and in that darkest hour of Jerusalem's night her Light beamed forth ; her Wisest and Greatest came in the midst of her, almost unknown, born under the law, to emancipate those who were groaning under the law. His Life, the day of His preaching, was Jerusalem's time of grace. During that time the Redeemer spake the things which belonged to her peace : those things were few and simple. He found her people mourning under political degradation. He told them that political degradation does not degrade the man ; the only thing that can degrade a man is slavery to sin. He told men who were looking merely to the past, no longer to look thither and say that Abraham was their father, for that God could raise up out of those stones children to Abraham, and a

344 Three Times in a Nation's History

greater than Abraham was there. He told them also not to look for some future deliverer, for deliverance was already come. They asked Him when the Kingdom of God should come; He told them they were not to cry, Lo here! or, lo there! for the Kingdom of God was within;—that they were to begin the Kingdom of God now, by each man becoming individually more holy, that if each man so reformed his own soul, the reformation of the kingdom would soon spread around them. They came to Him complaining of the Roman tribute; He asked for a piece of money, and said, "Render unto Cæsar the things that be Cæsar's, and to God the things that be God's;"—plainly telling them that the bondage from which men were to be delivered was not an earthly, but a spiritual bondage. He drew the distinction sharply between happiness and blessedness—the two things are opposite, although not necessarily contrary—He told them, "Blessed are the meek! Blessed are the poor in spirit!" The mourning man, and the poor man, and the persecuted man,—these were not happy, if happiness consists in the gratification of all our desires; but they were blessed beyond all earthly blessedness, for happiness is but the contentment of desire, while blessedness is the satisfaction of those aspirations which have God alone for their end and aim.

All these things were rejected by the nation. They were rejected first by the priests. They knew not that the mind of the age in which they lived was in advance of the traditional Judaism, and, therefore, they looked upon the Redeemer as an irreverent, ungodly man, a Sabbath-breaker. He was rejected by the rulers, who did not understand that in righteousness alone are governments to subsist, and, therefore, when He demanded of them justice, mercy, truth, they looked upon Him as a revolutionizer. He was rejected likewise by the people—that people ever ready to listen to any demagogue promising them earthly grandeur. They who on this occasion called out, "Hosanna to the Son of David," and were content to do so, so long as they believed He intended to lead them to personal comfort and enjoyment,

Three Times in a Nation's History. 345

afterwards cried out, "Crucify Him! crucify Him!" His blood be on us, and on our children;" so that His rejection was the act of the whole nation. Now, respecting this day of grace we have two remarks to make.

First: In this Advent of the Redeemer there was nothing outwardly remarkable to the men of that day. It was almost nothing. Of all the historians of that period few, indeed, are found to mention it. This is a thing which we at this day can scarcely understand; for to us the blessed Advent of our Lord is the brightest page in the world's history, but to them it was far otherwise. Remember, for one moment, what the Advent of our Lord was to all outward appearance. He seemed, let it be said reverently, to the rulers of those days, a fanatical freethinker. They heard of His miracles, but they appeared nothing remarkable to them; there was nothing there on which to fasten their attention. They heard that some of the populace had been led away, and now and then, it may be, some of His words reached their ears, but to them they were hard to be understood—full of mystery, or else they roused every evil passion in their hearts, so stern and uncompromising was the morality they taught. They put aside these words in that brief period, and the day of grace passed.

And just such as this is God's visitation to us. Generally, the day of God's visitation is not a day very remarkable outwardly. Bereavements, sorrows—no doubt, in these God speaks; but there are other occasions far more quiet and unobtrusive, but which are yet plainly days of grace. A scruple which others do not see, a doubt coming into the mind respecting some views held sacred by the popular creed, a sense of heart loneliness and solitariness, a feeling of awful misgiving when the Future lies open before us, the dread feeling of an eternal godlessness, for men who are living godless lives now,—these silent moments unmarked, these are the moments in which the Eternal is speaking to our souls.

Once more, that day of Jerusalem's visitation—her day of grace—was short. It was narrowed up into the short

346. Three Times in a Nation's History

space of three years and a half. After that, God still pleaded with individuals; but the national cause, as a cause, was gone. Jerusalem's doom was sealed when He pronounced those words. Again there is a lesson, a principle for us: God's day of visitation is frequently short. A few actions often decide the destiny of individuals, because they give a destination and form to habits; they settle the tone and form of the mind from which there will be in this life no alteration. So it is in the earliest history of our species. In those mysterious chapters at the commencement of the book of Genesis, we are told that it was one act which sealed the destiny of Adam and of all the human race. What was it but a very few actions, done in a very short time, that settled the destiny of those nations through which the children of Israel passed on their way to Canaan? The question for them was simply, whether they would show Israel mercy or not; this was all.

Once more, we see it again in the case of Saul. One circumstance, or, at the most, two, marked out his destiny. Then came those solemn words, "The strength of Israel cannot lie nor repent. The Lord hath rent the kingdom from thee this day." From that hour his course was downwards, his day of grace was past.

Brethren, the truth is plain. The day of visitation is awfully short. We say not that God *never* pleads a long time, but we say this, that sometimes God speaks to a nation or to a man but once. If not heard then, His voice is heard no more.

We pass on now to consider Israel's day of blindness. Judicial blindness is of a twofold character. It may be produced by removing the light, or by incapacitating the eye to receive that light. Sometimes men do not see because there is no light for them to see; and this was what was done to Israel—the Saviour was taken away from her. The voice of the apostles declared this truth: "It was necessary that the word should first have been spoken to you; but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles."

Three Times in a Nation's History. 347

There is a way of blindness by hardening the heart. Let us not conceal this truth from ourselves. God blinds the eye, but it is in the appointed course of His providential dealings. If a man *will not see*, the law is he *shall not see*; if he *will not do* what is right when he knows the right, then right shall become to him wrong, and wrong shall seem to be right. We read that God hardened Pharaoh's heart; that He blinded Israel. It is impossible to look at these cases of blindness without perceiving in them something of Divine action. Even at the moment when the Romans were at their gates, Jerusalem still dreamed of security; and when the battering-ram was at the tower of Antonia, the priests were celebrating, in fancied safety, their daily sacrifices. From the moment when our Master spake, there was deep stillness over her until her destruction; like the strange and unnatural stillness before the thunder-storm, when every breath seems hushed, and every leaf may be almost heard moving in the motionless air; and all this calm and stillness is but the prelude to the moment when the east and west are lighted up with the red flashes, and the whole creation seems to reel. Such was the blindness of that nation which would not know the day of her visitation.

• We pass on now to consider, lastly, her day of judgment. Her beautiful morning was clouded, her sun had gone down in gloom, and she was left in darkness. The account of the siege is one of the darkest passages in Roman history. In the providence of God, the history of what belongs, not to a Christian, but to a Jew. We all know the account that he has given us of the eleven hundred thousand who perished in that siege, of the thousands crucified along the sea-shore. We have all heard of the two factions that divided the city, of the intense hatred that made the cruelty of Jew towards Jew more terrible than even the vengeance of the Romans. This was the destruction of Jerusalem—the day of her ruin.

And now, brethren, let us observe, this judgment came in the way of natural consequences. We make a great mistake

348. Three Times in a Nation's History

respecting judgments. God's judgments are not arbitrary, but the results of natural laws. The historians tell us that Jerusalem owed her ruin to the fanaticism and obstinate blindness of her citizens; from all of which her Redeemer came to emancipate her. Had they understood, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," "Blessed are the meek," and "Blessed are the peace-makers;" had they understood that, Jerusalem's day of ruin might never have come.

Now let us apply this to the day we are at present celebrating. We all know that this destruction of Jerusalem is connected with the second coming of Christ. In St. Matthew the two advents are so blended together, that it is hard to separate one from the other; nay rather, it is impossible, because we have our Master's words, "Verily, I say unto you, this generation shall not pass till all be fulfilled." Therefore this prophecy, in all its fulness, came to pass in the destruction of Jerusalem. But it is impossible to look at it without perceiving there is also something farther included; we shall understand it by turning to the elucidation given by our Lord Himself. When the apostles asked, Where shall all these things be? His reply was, in effect, this—Ask you where? I tell you nowhere in particular, or rather, everywhere; for wheresoever there is corruption, there will be destruction—"where the carcass, thither will the eagles be gathered together." So that this first coming of the Son of Man to judgment was the type, the specimen of what shall be hereafter.

And now, brethren, let us apply this subject still more home. Is there no such thing as blindness among ourselves? May not this be *our* day of visitation? First, there is among us priestly blindness; the blindness of men who know not that the demands of this age are in advance of those that have gone before. There is no blindness greater than that of those who think that the panacea for the evils of a country is to be found in ecclesiastical union. But let us not be mistaken: it is not here, we think, that the great danger lies. We dread not Rome. No man can understand the signs of the times, who does not feel that

Three Times in a Nation's History 349

the day of Rome is passing away, as that of Jerusalem once did. But the danger lies in this consideration,—we find that where the doctrines of Rome have been at all successful, it has been among the clergy and upper classes; while, when presented to the middle and lower classes, they have been at once rejected. There is then, apparently, a gulf between the two. If there be added to the difference of position a still farther and deeper difference of religion, then who shall dare to say what the end shall be?

Once more, we look at the blindness of men talking of intellectual enlightenment. It is true that we have more enlightened civilization and comfort. What then? will that retard our day of judgment? Jerusalem was becoming more enlightened, and Rome was at its most civilized point, when the destroyer was at their gates.

Therefore, let us know the day of our visitation. It is not the day of refinement, nor of political liberty, nor of advancing intellect. We must go again in the old, old way; we must return to simpler manners and to a purer life. We want more faith, more love. The Life of Christ and the Death of Christ must be made the law of our life. Reject that, and we reject our own salvation; and, in rejecting that, we bring on in rapid steps, for the nation and for ourselves, the day of judgment and of ruin.

THE END

RICHARD CLAY & SONS, LIMITED,
BREAD STREET HILL, E.C., AND
BUNGAY, SUFFOLK.

